SERENITY

A MOVIE

Written

by

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UN-NUMBERED DRAFT
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We see the Earth.

White pops blossom on the surface, and moments later ships -- huge, intricate space-freighters -- come roaring from the surface, passing camera with a thunder of gas and flame.

We hear a woman's voice:

VOICEOVER
Earth-That-Was could no longer sustain our numbers, we were so many.

We see a solar system; a sun like our own, surrounded by many more planets than ours, they in turn surrounded by moons.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
We found a new galaxy: dozens of planets and hundreds of moons.

We see a terraform station; a bunker-like complex many miles across, air billowing from it, electricity running over it.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
Each one terraformed -- a process taking decades -- to support human life. To be new Earths.

We see a futuristic megalopolis, gleaming and cool.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
The Central Planets were the first settled and are the most advanced, embodying civilization at its peak.

We see an empty desert plain, then pull out to see the entire planet -- and further, to see we're on the edge of the galaxy.

VOICEOVER
(continuing)
Life on the outer planets is much more primitive, and difficult. That's why the Central planets formed the Alliance, so everyone can enjoy the comfort and enlightenment of true civilization. That's why we fought the War for Unification.

During this a woman steps in front of the last image and we see it is on a wall screen in a:
EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

It's a group of twelve-year-olds, serious and well dressed. They sit on their heels under a sparsely elegant tent, small wooden desks with embedded screens in front of them. The tent is on a lawn surrounded by lush foliage. People walk about and vehicles glide quietly overhead. A utopian vista.

GIRL
Now that the war's over, our soldiers get to come home, yes?

TEACHER
Some of them. Some will be stationed on the rim planets as Peace Enforcers.

BOY
I don't understand. Why were the Independents even fighting us? Why wouldn't they look to be more civilized?

TEACHER
That's a good question. Does anybody want to open on that?

GIRL
I hear they're cannibals.

ANOTHER BOY
That's only Reavers.

ANOTHER GIRL
Reavers aren't real.

ANOTHER BOY
Full well they are. They attack settlers from space, they kill them and wear their skins and rape them for hours and hours --

TEACHER
(in Chinese)
We will enjoy your silence now!
(calmer)
It's true that there are... dangers on the outer planets. So let's follow up on Borodin's question. With all the social and medical advancements we can bring to the Independents, why would they fight so hard against us?
RIVER
We meddle.

TEACHER
River? <I'm sorry?>

RIVER is a dark, intense little girl, writing with one hand and "typing" with the other. (Typing consists of holding a long wooden stylus and tapping either end down different columns of Chinese characters on her desktop screen.) She is a good two years younger than the other kids.

RIVER
People don't like to be meddled with. We tell them what to do, what to think, don't run don't walk we're in their homes and in their heads and we haven't the right. We're meddlesome.

TEACHER
(gently taking her stylus)
River, we're not telling people what to think. We're just trying to show them how.

She violently PLUNGES the stylus into the girl's forehead --

INT. LAB - NIGHT

And we FLASH CUT to the actual present: a 16 year old RIVER sitting in a metal chair, needles stuck in her skull (one right where the teacher had stuck her) being adjusted by a technician. A second monitors her brain patterns.

The lab is cold, blue, steel. Insidiously clean.

2ND TECHNICIAN
She's dreaming.

FIRST TECHNICIAN
Nightmare?

2ND TECHNICIAN
Off the charts. Scary monsters.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Let's amp it up. Delcium, eight-drop.

DOCTOR MATHIAS is not instantly likable -- nor gradually, for that matter. A cold man, and more than a little satisfied with himself.
Behind him stands a GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR, observing. And making him a little nervous.

The Inspector is in shadow, but his uniform indicates substantial rank, as does the eagle-crested baton -- no longer than a ruler -- that he clutches in one gloved hand.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
(continuing)
See, most of our best work is done when they're asleep. We can monitor and direct their subconscious, implant suggestions...

River starts convulsing, mewing in misery. The Inspector starts forward, slowly.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
(continuing)
It's a little startling to see, but the results are spectacular. Especially in this case. River Tam is our star pupil.

The Inspector steps into the light. He is rigid, cold, staring at the girl with no emotion at all. His name, as we will very soon learn, is SIMON.

SIMON
I've heard that.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
She's a genius. Her mental capacity is extraordinary, even with the side-effects.

SIMON
Tell me about them.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Well, obviously, she's unstable... the neural stripping gives them heightened cognitive reception, but it also destabilizes their own reality matrix. It manifests as borderline schizophrenia... which at this point is the price for being truly psychic.

SIMON
(moves toward her)
What use do we have for a psychic if she's insane?
DOCTOR MATHIAS
I don't have to tell you the security potential of someone who can read minds. And she has lucid periods -- we hope to improve upon the... I'm sorry, Sir, I have to ask if there's some reason for this inspection.

SIMON
(turning)
Am I making you nervous?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Key members of Parliament have personally observed this subject. I was told their support for the project was unanimous. The demonstration of her power --

SIMON
(turns back to her)
How is she physically?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Like nothing we've seen. All our subjects are conditioned for combat, but River... she's a creature of extraordinary grace.

SIMON
Yes. She always did love to dance.

He drops to one knee, slamming his baton to the floor.

ANGLE: THE BATON

As the top pops off like a bouncing betty (the grenade), flying up over Simon and River's heads and then bursting forth in a flat circle of blue energy that bisects the room, flowing through the staff's heads and knocking them out.

Simon rushes to River, gently removes the probes from her head and swabs her, whispering:

SIMON
-(continuing)
River. Wake up. Please, it's Simon. River. It's your brother. Wake up...

She begins to stir as a noise moves him to the door, looking out and removing his uniform to reveal an orderly's tunic beneath.
River is suddenly next to him. He jumps a little.

RIVER

Simon.

A beat, as they face each other, Simon fighting emotion.

RIVER
(continuing)
They know you've come.

INT. GUARD STATION - CONTINUING

As a guard looks at a monitor. He mostly resembles a secret service man -- more bureaucrat than thug. A second man rolls into frame on a chair behind him, also watching the screen.

INT. RESEARCH CENTER CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

Simon walks River through the corridor. They approach a pair of double doors.

SIMON
We can't make it to the surface from inside.

Simon turns suddenly as he hears footsteps, people heading at them from the other side of the doors.

SIMON
(continuing)
Find a --

But River has, impossibly, scampered up over some lab equipment to the dark top of the corridor, where she holds herself in a perfect split, feet against the walls and outstretched hand holding the sprinkler for support.

The doors burst open and two doctors pass by, hardly noticing the lone orderly. Passing right under River.

EXT. VENTILATION SHAFT - MOMENTS LATER

It's small, 15 feet by 15 feet. Goes a long way up and a long way down. One wide hinged window looks in on the hall inside. Simon and River approach with quiet haste.

They slip through the window. Simon shuts it, wedges his baton into the handle as the SECURITY AGENTS APPROACH. They fire at the glass, but their lasers have no effect.

Wind whips River's hair about as she looks up to see a small patch of daylight visible ten stories up. Sees the sky blotted out by a small ship that hovers above them.
ANGLE: THE SHIP is floating over the grass of rolling hills, the city gleaming far beyond. This facility is well hidden.

A gurney-sized section of the ship's belly detaches and drops down ten stories, cables spooling it out of the ship. It comes to Simon and River and stops suddenly.

SIMON

Get on!

He is standing by the window -- and the Security Agent is right behind him, PUNCHING the window with all his might.

Simon helps River onto the gurney, then jumps on himself as the Security Agent cracks the glass. The two are whisked up in the gurney, River on her knees, Simon standing beside her holding one of the cables --

THE OPERATIVE (O.S.)

Stop.

The action freezes.

THE OPERATIVE (O.S.)
(continuing)

The action REVERSES, taking us back to the moment of Simon and River on the gurney just before it rises.

THE OPERATIVE (O.S.)
(continuing)
Stop.

There is a motionless beat, River frozen in that crouch, and he steps through what we now see is a hologram of the event. The Government's man. We'll just call him THE OPERATIVE.

He is thoughtful, a little removed. Wire-rimmed glasses, a suit too nondescript to be a uniform, too neat to be casual wear. He is in:

INT. INSTITUTE RECORDS ROOM - DAY

-- which is long and bare but for drawers of holographic records, a set-up for watching recordings (where the image of Simon and River floats), and a table with computer and chair. The Operative crosses to the table, looks over some papers.

THE OPERATIVE
Biograph. Simon Tam.

CLOSE ON: THE OPERATIVE'S GLASSES
As Simon's history files down in print and pictures --
graduation, security photo from his medical internship --
over one lens of the Operative's glasses.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
Remarkable children.

Doctor Mathias storms in, two security men (not the ones from
the opening) and a nervous young female intern following.
Mathias looks greyer and more gaunt than when we saw him last.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Excuse me! No one is allowed in
the records room without my
express permission.

THE OPERATIVE
(over this, quietly)
Enter the doctor.
(to Mathias)
Forgive me. I prefer to see the
event alone, without bias.

Mathias looks at the hologram -- realizes which one it is.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I need to see your clearance.

THE OPERATIVE
You're right to insist. I know
you've had security issues here.

He places his hand on a screen as he says it. Mathias looks
at the readout, and drops the bluster.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Apologies. An Operative of the
Parliament will of course have
full cooperation.
(looks at screen)
I'm not sure what... I see no
listing of rank, or name.

THE OPERATIVE
I have neither. Like this
facility, I don't exist. The
Parliament calls me in when...
when they wish they didn't have
to. Let's talk about the Tams.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I assume you've scanned the status
logs...
THE OPERATIVE
River was your greatest success.
A prodigy -- A phenomenon. Until
her brother walked in eight months
ago and took her from you.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
It's not quite so simple.

THE OPERATIVE
I'm very aware of that.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
He came in with full creds. He
beat the ap-scan, the retinal...
There was no way I could --

THE OPERATIVE
No, no. Of course. The boy spent
his fortune developing the
contacts to infiltrate this place.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Gave up a brilliant future in
medicine as well, you've probably
read. Turned his back on his
whole life. Madness.

THE OPERATIVE
Madness, no. Something a good
deal more dangerous. Have you
looked at this scan carefully? At
his face?

Mathias looks uncertain.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
It's love, in point of fact. He
loved his sister and he knew she
was in pain. So he took her
somewhere safe.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Why are you here?

THE OPERATIVE
I'm here because the situation is
even less simple than you think.
(eyeing him)
Do you know what your sin is,
Doctor?
DOCTOR MATHIAS
I... I would be very careful about what you --

THE OPERATIVE
(sadly)
It's pride.

He touches the computer screen and the holographic image jumps to the Doctor and Simon in the lab, Mathias repeating:

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Key members of Parliament have personally observed this subject.
I was told their support --

THE OPERATIVE
(shutting it off)
Key members of Parliament. Key. The minds behind every diplomatic, military and covert operation in the galaxy, and you put them in a room with a psychic.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
She was... she read cards, nothing more.

THE OPERATIVE
It's come to our attention that River became much more unstable, more... disturbed, after you showed her off to Parliament. Did she see something very terrible in those cards?

DOCTOR MATHIAS
Whatever... secrets she might have accidentally gleaned... it's probable she doesn't even know she knows them. That they're buried beneath --

THE OPERATIVE
But they are in her. Her mind is unquiet. It's the will of the Parliament that I kill her. And the brother. Because of your sin.
THE OPERATIVE
(continuing; moving to his briefcase)
You know, in certain older civilized cultures, when men failed as entirely as you have, they would throw themselves on their swords.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
(fed up)
Well, unfortunately I forgot to bring a sword to --

The air rings crisply as the Operative pulls out his sword.

THE OPERATIVE
The Parliament has no further interest in psychics. They represent a threat to the harmony and stability of our Alliance.

DOCTOR MATHIAS
I would put that down right now if I were you.

THE OPERATIVE
Would you be killed in your sleep, like an ailing pet? Whatever your failings, I believe you deserve better than that.

The agents move. He slices the throat of the one behind him with true grace, thrusting at the second as he's pulling out his gun and pinning his hand. A moment, and the dying agent reflexively squeezes the trigger, shooting his own arm.

The Operative pulls out the sword and the agent falls as quietly as the first.

Mathias bolts but the Operative pins him to the wall. He bunches his fingers and jabs the side of the Doctor's spine. Mathias stiffens, suddenly, agonizingly immobile.

The Operative steps back, observes the Doctor's rigid grimace for a moment. Almost ceremoniously, he drops to one knee and holds the blade out to one side, hilt to the floor and point tilted toward the doctor. The Doctor stares at it in horror as his paralyzed body begins to tip over toward it.

The Operative turns toward the terrified intern at the door.
THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
Young miss, I'll need all the logs on behavioral modification triggers. We'll have to reach out to River Tam, and help her to come back to us. No matter how far out Simon has taken her, we can --

He's almost startled when the Doctor's body drops into frame, slowed suddenly by the sword. It squeaks down the blade, the Doctor unable to cry out, as the Operative whispers to him:

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
This is a good death. There's no shame in this, in a man's death. A man who's done fine works. We're making a better world. All of them, better worlds.

Mathias is dead. The Operative pulls the sword out as the body rolls over. As he wipes the sword down:

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
Young miss, I need you to get to work now. I think I may have a long way to travel.

She goes. He approaches River, very close, staring...

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
Where are you hiding, little girl?

The noise is sucked suddenly out of the room as we black out.
SERENITY
... becomes the name painted on the side of a spaceship, with the same in Chinese behind it.

EXT. SPACE, ORBITING THE MOON "LILAC" - DAY

We move away from the ship. The name is on the nose, under the bridge. It sticks out from the body of the ship like a craning neck. The body is bulbous, with propulsion engines on either side and a giant glowing back. There are two small shuttles tucked in over the 'wings' of the engines. It's not the sleekest ship in the 'verse, to be sure.

As it hits atmo, the propulsion engines take over and she starts to rock a bit, noise filling our ears. Camera comes around the front, at the windows and into the bridge, to see the Captain, MALCOLM 'MAL' REYNOLDS, standing and watching.

At that moment, a small piece of the nose breaks off and goes flying past the window.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

[Note: the following sequence will take us through the ship in one extended STEADICAM shot.]

The bridge is small: two pilot seats on either side, and a tangle of wires and machinery all about.

Mal wears the knee-length brown coat and boots of an old Independent. Gun at his hip. He's not unlike the ship -- he's seen a bit of the world and it left him, emotionally at least, weathered. Right now, though, he's mostly startled.

MAL

What was that?

He's addressing the pilot, WASH. Flight gear and a hawaiian shirt, toy dinosaurs populating his station -- no old soldier, but just as startled.

WASH

Whoah! Did you see that --

The ship bucks --

MAL

Was that the primary buffer panel?

WASH

It did seem to resemble --
MAL
Did the Primary Buffer Panel just fall off my gorrann ship for no apparent reason?

Another buck --

WASH
Looks like.

MAL
I thought Kaylee checked our entry couplings! I have a very clear memory of it --

WASH
Yeah well if she doesn't give us some extra flow from the engine room to offset the burnthrough this landing is gonna get pretty interesting.

MAL
Define "Interesting".

WASH
(calm suggestion:)
"Oh god, oh god, we're all gonna die?"

MAL
(hits the com)
This is the Captain. There's a little problem with our entry sequence; we may experience slight turbulence and then explode.
(to Wash, exiting)
Can you shave the vector --

WASH
I'm doing it! It's not enough.
(hits com)
Kaylee!

MAL
Just get us on the ground!

WASH
That part'll happen, pretty definitely.
INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

The camera leads Mal down. On either side of the hall are ladders leading down to crew's personal quarters.

The hulking mercenary JAYNE is coming up out of his bunk as Mal passes. He carries a number of rifles and grenades.

JAYNE
We're gonna explode? I don't wanna explode.

MAL
Jayne, how many weapons you plan on bringing? You only got the two arms...

JAYNE
I just get excitable as to choice, like to have my options open.

MAL
I don't plan on any shooting taking place during this job.

JAYNE
Well, what you plan and what takes place ain't ever exactly been similar.

MAL
No grenades.
(Jayne groans)
No grenades.

First Mate ZOE enters from the lower level. Her mode of dress and military deference mark her as a war buddy of Mal's.

ZOE
Are we crashing again?

MAL
Talk to your husband. Is the mule prepped?

ZOE
Good to go, sir. Just loading her up.
(to Jayne)
Are those grenades?

JAYNE
Cap'n doesn't want 'em.
ZOE
We're robbing the place. We're not occupying it.

All that plays in the background as we lead Mal into the:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

It's the communal space of the ship, homey and messy. There is food left lying on the table. Mal swipes a dumpling from a plate, pops it in his mouth as another jolt rocks him and sends most of the tableware clattering to the floor.

MAL
(calling out)
Kaylee!

He enters:

INT. AFT HALL/ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL
(still calling)
Kaylee, what in the sphincter of hell are you playing at?

The hall leads to the rust-brown chaos that is the engine room. Working around the engine in a forest of wires, sparks and smoke is the sweetly pretty mechanic, KAYLEE. She passes Mal with a slightly impatient smile as he stands in the doorway, raising his voice above the din.

MAL
(continuing)
We got the Primary Buffer --

KAYLEE
Everything's shiny, Cap'n. Not to fret.

MAL
You told me --
(jolt)
You told me the entry couplings would hold for another week!

KAYLEE
(working)
That was six months ago, cap'n.

MAL
My ship don't crash. If she crashes, you crashed her.
Steam and electricity shoot at him, backing him up.

He turns to see Simon behind him. Simon is more seasoned than before, but still contrasts the Captain entirely in dress and manner. He is implacably proper. Also pissed.

MAL
(continuing)
Doctor. Guess I need to get innocked 'fore we hit planetside.

Simon nods, the ship jolting again.

MAL
(continuing)
Bit of a rockety ride. Nothing to worry about.

SIMON
I'm not worried.

MAL
Fear is nothing to be ashamed of, Doc.

SIMON
This isn't fear. This is anger.

MAL
(laughs)
Well, it's kinda hard to tell the one from t'other, face like yours.

SIMON
I imagine if it were fear, my eyes would be wider.

MAL
I'll look for that next time.

SIMON
You're not taking her.

MAL
(brushing past him)
No no, that's not a thing I'm interested in talking over with --

SIMON
She's not going with you. That's final.
MAL
(turning back)
I hear the words "that's final"
come out of your mouth ever again,
they truly will be.
(turning away again)
This is my boat. Y'all are guests
on it.

He heads down a side corridor that has steps leading down to:

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

Simon is right on his heels as we lead them down the stairs.

SIMON
Guests? I earn my passage,
Captain --

MAL
And it's time your little sister
learned from your fine example.

SIMON
I've earned my passage treating
bullet holes, knife wounds, laser
burns...

MAL
Some of our jobs are trickier than
others --

SIMON
And you want to put my sister in
the middle of that.

MAL
Didn't say 'want'. Said 'will'.
It's one job, Doc. She'll be fine.

The passenger dorm has a time-worn warmth that most of the
ship shares. Except, of course, for the sterile blue of:

INT. INFIRMARY - CONTINUING

Into which the two men step.

SIMON
She's a seventeen year old girl.
A mentally traumatized sevente--
MAL
She's a reader. Sees into the
truth of things; might see trouble
before it's coming. Which is of
use to me.

SIMON
And that's your guiding star,
Isn't it? What's of use.

MAL
(laughs)
Honestly, doctor, I think we may
really crash this time anyway.

Simon jabs the inoculation needle into Mal's arm.

SIMON
Do you understand what I've gone
through to keep River away from
the Alliance?

MAL
I do, and it's a fact me and mine
have been courteous enough to keep
to our own selves.

SIMON
Are you threatening to --

MAL
I got one purpose here: keep this
boat in the air. I take the jobs
I get -- which is less and less,
case you ain't been keeping track.

He starts away, Simon still keeping pace.

MAL
(continuing)
Every year since the war the
Alliance pushes just a little
further out towards the rim.
Makes it a chore for naughty men
like us to slip about -- and
keeping you two on board means
working twice as hard to avoid the
law. Means turning down a score
of honest jobs.
INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

They enter the biggest space on the ship. Giant doors sit at the front, which will open upon landing to reveal a lowering ramp. Catwalks surround the space, leading up at the front to the foredeck hall. We've come all the way through Serenity.

MAL
So here is us, on the raggedy edge. Don't push me and I won't push you. <Are we clear here?>

Simon starts up the stairs as Mal calls to him:

MAL
(continuing)
Things get gritty I will keep her from the fray, but she's coming. Best you get her ready.

As Mal walks on, we tilt up to see the Mule, a four-man hovercraft hanging from chains near the ceiling. Jayne and Zoe are tossing duffle bags into it.

MAL
(continuing)
Zoe, is Wash gonna straighten this boat out before we get flattened?

ZOE
Like a downy feather, sir. Nobody flies like my mister.

The camera picks up Simon's feet as they enter foreground on the catwalk, and track with them to find:

SIMON
River...

She's lying on her side, looking straight at us. A loose summer dress draped over her small frame.

RIVER
I know. We're going for a ride.

EXT. LILAC -- DESERT GULCH - DAY

Serenity settles gently down as the cargo bay door opens.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

The chains are hoisted back up into the ceiling of the ship. The mule floats just above the floor, Jayne piling in next to River in the back:
SIMON
Now, River, you stay behind the others. If there's fighting you drop to the floor or run away. It's okay to leave them to die.

River puts on a huge pair of goggles, looks at her brother.

RIVER
I'm the brains of the operation.

ZOE
We should hit town right during Sunday worship. Won't be any crowds.

MAL
If Fanky and Mingo are right about the payroll, this could look to be a sunny day for us.

SIMON
(approaching)
Captain, I'll ask you one last time...

MAL
Doctor, I'm taking your sister under my protection here. If anything happens to her, anything at all, I swear to you I will get very choked up. Honestly. There could be tears.

He peels out, leaves Simon fuming. Kaylee sidles up to him...

KAYLEE
Don't mind the Captain none, Simon. I know he'll look out for her.

SIMON
It's amazing. I bring River all the way out to the raggedy edge of the 'verse so she can hide from the Alliance by robbing banks.

KAYLEE
It's just a little Trading Station. They'll be back 'fore you can spit.
(as he stalks off)
Not that you spit...
Kaylee watches him go, a tad forlorn.

EXT. LILAC - DAY

We see the town sprawled before us, as the mule heads in.

The town embodies the lives of folk out here: adobe and wood mix with metal and plastic -- whatever's on hand to build with. Right now the streets are mainly empty.

EXT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

The mule pulls up, Zoe hitching it as they speak:

JAYNE
What are we hoping to find here
that equals the worth of a turd?

MAL
Alliance payroll. There's peace
enforcing squads stationed all
about this quadrant. Can't use
credits out here -- they got to
pay their boys in cashy money.
Which once a month rests here.

ZOE
Something about stealing from the
Alliance just warms a body like
whiskey in winter.

JAYNE
(cocks his gun)
Shiny. Let's be badguys.

Mal turns back to River.

MAL
You ready to go to work, darlin'?

RIVER
There's no pattern to the pebbles
here, they're completely random.
I tried to count them but you
drove too fast. Hummingbird.

MAL
(never mind)
Right. Great. Let's go.

INT. TRADING STATION - DAY

We are in a camera's eye view, right above the door.
The door slams open, Mal and Jayne stride in, Zoe following and whipping her hogleg right at camera without looking. Reverse to see the camera is also a small screen with "Welcome to Lilac" on it for the millisecond before it's blown to bits.

There's maybe fifteen people in the place: store workers, farm-folk and a couple dirt-poor kids. It's a combination post-office, general store, bank, and most other things.

MAL
   Hands and knees and heads bowed
down! Everybody, now!

Two men who appear to be farm folk rush Mal and the others. Mal draws on the elder one and he stops dead in his tracks. Mal's gun is long, not unlike Civil War era issue, but very much new in design.

The other tries to tackle Jayne, which is not necessarily a great idea. Jayne clotheslines him so hard he spins right upside-down -- and Jayne grabs him by the legs and CRACK! -- bounces his head right off the floor, knocking him out cold.

MAL
   (continuing)
   Y'all wanna be looking very
   intently at your own belly
   buttons. I see a head start to
   rise, violence is gonna ensue.

The guy who rushed Mal complies along with everyone else. Jayne dumps his catch on the floor and rips open his dirty shirt to reveal the purple of an Alliance uniform.

JAYNE
   Looks like this is the place.

He looks up at Mal, who motions for Zoe to open the front door. She does, and River steps in.

ANGLE: RIVER'S BARE FEET -- walking slowly among the hunched-over customers as Mal addresses them.

MAL
   You've probably guessed we mean to
   be thieving here, but what we are
   after is not yours. So let's have
   no undue fussing.

As he is speaking, Jayne is scrambling to the back office, finding the small vault locked.
JAYNE
She's locked up.

River suddenly looks around, perturbed.

CLOSE ON: a young tough.

River looks up at Zoe, alarmed, and silently points to the young man. He is slowly reaching for the weapon in his belt.

He finds Zoe's sawed-off nuzzling his cheek.

ZOE
You know what the definition of a hero is? It's someone who gets other people killed. You can look it up later.

He drops his weapon, slides it across the floor.

Mal moves to the Trade Agent. Hauls him up, tosses him toward the vault. Zoe and Jayne follow.

TRADE AGENT
This is just a crop moon, don't think you'll find what you --

MAL
(in Chinese)
<Shut up and make us wealthy.>

The old man punches in the code. What opens is a tiny wall safe. Bundles of bills, some scattered coin. Unimpressive. Jayne and Zoe are behind the captain, peering in.

ZOE
At last. We can retire and give up this life of crime.

Mal reaches in, pulls a lever and the floor opens, a six foot hole appearing, stairs leading to a corridor, all gleaming metal and blue light. Zoe smiles. Jayne peers down as Mal addresses the Trade Agent.

MAL
Is there a fed down there? Be truthful.

TRADE AGENT
(nodding)
Y'all are Browncoats, hey? Fought for independence?
MAL
War's long done. We're all just
talk now.
(calls down)
Listen up! We are coming down to
empty that vault!

The voice of a young Alliance GUARD comes up from below.

GUARD (O.S.)
You have to give me your
authorization password!

Jayne impatiently fires a burst of machine-gun fire down into
the hole. A beat...

GUARD (O.S.)
(continuing)
Okay...

Mal looks at Zoe and they head down into:

INT. VAULT - CONTINUING

Which is as modern as something off the Central Planets. A
short corridor leads to a real vault door, that the guard is
already opening. Behind that door, a few bags of the real
deal: neatly stacked cash, waiting to be robbed.

INT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

We move in on River as something crosses her face. Worry.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

A WOMAN carrying a bucket and her nine year old SON are
looking at the trading station a few buildings away.

SON
Repeater.

WOMAN
Did sound summat like gunblast...
Maybe you aught run tell Lawman...

She turns and right by her, in the shadows, is a man.

Mostly. He is hideously disfigured, a combination of self-
mutilation and the bubbling red of radiation poisoning. His
clothes are rags, his eyes pinpoints of glazed madness.

A blade blurs through frame...
INT. TRADING STATION - CONTINUING

River SCREAMS and flops onto her back, pinned by revelation. Others look at her, concerned, as Jayne makes his way to her.

JAYNE
What the hell is up? You all right? What's goin' on?

He holds her, as she whispers, wide-eyed...

RIVER
Reavers.

INT. VAULT - MOMENTS LATER

Zoe is hauling out the last of five bags as Mal talks to the guard, holding his gun at him:

MAL
Leg's good, it'll bleed plenty and we avoid any necessary organs...

GUARD
I was thinking more of a graze...

MAL
Well you don't want it to look like you just gave up...

JAYNE (O.S.)
MAL!

MAL (to himself)
Every heist, he's gotta start yelling my name --

JAYNE (barreling in)
Mal! Reavers! The girl's pitchin' a fit. They're here or they're comin' soon.

He is already loading up with bags as Mal thinks quickly.

MAL (to Zoe and Jayne)
Get on the mule.
(to the guard, pointing to the vault)
Does that open from the inside?
GUARD
Whah -ah- yes...

MAL
You get everyone upstairs in there and you seal it. Long as you got air you don't open up, you understand?

GUARD
I -- Buh I --

Mal is in his face, dark and huge:

MAL
GET THEM INSIDE THE VAULT.

EXT. TRADING STATION - DAY

The doors burst open, Jayne and Zoe coming out first, Mal behind with River in hand. She is freaked, in her own space. Jayne and Zoe throw the bags on --

MAL
Zoe take the wheel --

JAYNE
You see 'em? Anybody see 'em?

-- and jump on themselves, Mal scanning the area as he hands River up to Jayne's care. As the craft powers up, slowly moving, the young man Zoe kept from trying to pull his weapon bursts out of the station, grabbing the back of the mule.

YOUNG MAN
Take me with you!

MAL
Get in the vault with the others --

YOUNG MAN
I can't stay here! Please!

MAL
It's too many. Drive, Zoe.

A Reaver craft ROARS over their heads. It's nearly the size of Serenity. Torn apart, belching smoke -- a welded conglomeration of ruined ships, painted for war. Predator, pure. It disappears over the rooftops.

YOUNG MAN
PLEASE!
MAL

Drive!

Zoe's face is set with unhappy determination as she floors it, shooting out and leaving the young man in the dust.

As they move from him, four Reavers jump out of the shadows and grab the young man. Mal unhesitatingly draws his gun. He nudges a lever with his thumb and a cartridge pops back.

Mal fires twice. The young man takes both bullets in the chest, slumps down dead.

ANGLE: THE EDGE OF TOWN

As the mule shoots past the last building, we see a skiff shoot out from behind the buildings of the adjacent street, right abreast of our gang.

ANGLE: THE CENTER OF TOWN

We see the church as the first ship and an even larger one come to hover over it, Reavers dropping down on cable lines to swarm into it.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The mule and the skiff are booking through the rocky terrain. The skiff swings closer, but Jayne peppers it with automatic fire and it swings away. There is sporadic return fire.

JAYNE
How come they ain't blowing us out of the air?

MAL
They wanna run us down. The up-close kill.

River is squashed down on her back, being very small.

RIVER
They want us alive when they eat us.

JAYNE
Boy, sure would be nice if we had some grenades, don'tcha think?

Mal says nothing, keeps firing.

ZOE
Wash, baby can you hear me?
INT. SERENITY: BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is in a frenzy of switchflipping, prepping for take-off.

WASH
We're moments from air. You got somebody behind you?

We intercut Wash and Zoe at this point:

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

ZOE
Reavers.

WASH
(blanching)
<merciless hell...>

ZOE
We're not gonna reach you in time.

WASH
Just keep moving, honey. We're coming to you.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

As she lifts off and starts heading toward the others.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

Zoe gets the mule in front but a harpoon thwinnngs through the air from the skiff and SHHNNK! Goes through Jayne's leg. The harpoon grips the leg and pulls --

Jayne goes flying off the back of the Mule, Mal just grabbing him as the harpoon line reels slowly tighter --

MAL
Grab on!

Jayne grabs the Mule, legs dangling, pulled out between the two vessels as Mal slams a new cartridge into his pistol.

JAYNE
I won't get et! You shoot me if they take me!

Mal steadies himself and takes aim, seemingly at Jayne --

JAYNE
(continuing)
Well don't shoot me first!
Mal fires. Again. Steadies himself for one more...

The line holding the harpoon is split by Mal's third shot.

The mule surges forward as Jayne drags on the ground. Mal hauls him in as River bounds into the front to make room.

   JAYNE
   (continuing)
   Rutting pigs! Where's --

And River is holding out his weapon before he can ask for it.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE DESERT - CONTINUING

Serenity rushes across the desert floor, not much higher off it than the smaller crafts.

   WASH
   (to Zoe)
   Get some distance on 'em. You come to the flats, I want you to swing round. Gonna try a Barn Swallow.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash hits the com.

   WASH
   Simon! Open the loading dock!

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Simon moves next to the huge sliding doors at the front, hits a couple of buttons. The doors pull open, as the huge ramp beyond them opens down, letting in a rush of wind and light.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

The mule reaches the flats, away from the rocks.

   WASH (O.S.)
   (in Zoe's ear)
   Okay, baby, we've talked this through...

   ZOE
   Talkin' ain't doin'.

She throws the wheel and the mule comes hard about, fishtailing slightly as it faces the oncoming skiff.

   WASH (O.S.)
   Don't slow down!
ANGLE: THE SKIFF

As it heads for the mule --

ANGLE: THE MULE

As it heads for the skiff -- and Serenity swoops down out of the sky, bay doors open, and comes right up behind it -- The Mule swallowed by the bigger ship --

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

And only its forward momentum keeps it from being squashed as it flies backwards into the bay, narrowly missing Simon and smashing back into the staircase, sparks and people flying --

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUING

Serenity tries to get altitude -- but slams right into the oncoming skiff, tearing it apart --

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

A flaming portion of the top flies in, skids to the floor as small fires erupt from the mule as well -- Simon pulls a lever and jets of CO2 shoot out of the floor.

Simon hits the button to start the outer ramp closing, then runs to the mule. The CO2 stops and he finds River sitting in her seat, completely unharmed. Zoe is climbing painfully out of the other seat, Mal and Jayne both having been thrown.

SIMON

River?

RIVER

I swallowed a bug.

Kaylee runs in to see how everyone is. She goes to Simon.

KAYLEE

Are you okay?

MAL

Is he okay?

A bloodied Reaver POPS into frame from under the skiff-top. He lunges for Mal, baring sharpened teeth --

Mal spins and draws, fires into his belly as Jayne and Zoe both fire at the same time. The freak takes too long to go down, but down he goes. Dies sitting against the skiff top.

Everybody takes a moment to look at each other.
WASH (O.S.)
We all here? What's going on?
Hello?

ZOE
(moves to the com)
No casualties. Anybody following?

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH
Nice flying, baby, and that's a
negative. Clean getaway -- Out of
atmo in six minutes.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

MAL
Set course for Beaumonde.
(to the others)
First thing, I want these bod --

Simon suddenly punches him in the face, causing Mal to
stumble back, and Simon to shake his hand in pain.

MAL
(continuing)
<You wanna bullet? You wanna
bullet right in your throat?>

SIMON
You stupid, selfish, son of a
whore ---

MAL
I'm a hair's breadth from riddling
you with holes, Doctor --

SIMON
"One simple job! She'll be fine!"

MAL
She IS fine! Except for bein'
still crazy, she's the picture of
health!

ZOE
Wasn't for River, we'd probably be
left there. She felt 'em coming.

SIMON
Never again. You understand me?
MAL
Seems I remember a talk about you giving orders on my boat.

SIMON
Well sleep easy 'cause we're off your boat. Just as soon as River gets her share of the "bounty".

KAYLEE
Well let's not do anything hasty...

MAL
No, shiny! I'm sick a' carrying tourists anyhow. We'll be on Beaumonde in ten hours time, you can pick up your earnings and be on your merry. Meantime you do your job. Patch up my crew.

A beat.

RIVER
He didn't lie down. They never lie down.

She is looking at the Reaver. Everyone does, for a moment.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - MOMENTS LATER
Mal and Zoe enter from below.

ZOE
No, I think things'll glide a deal smoother for us without River and Simon on board... but how long do you think they'll last?

MAL
Doc made his call. They's as babes in a basket when we took 'em in; we sheltered 'em plenty. Man has to cut loose, learn to stand on his own.

ZOE
Like that man back in town?

They stop by Mal's room.

MAL
I had to shoot him. What the Reavers woulda done to him before they killed him...
ZOE
I know. That was a piece a' mercy. But before that, him begging us to bring him along...

MAL
We couldn't take the weight. Woulda slowed us down.

ZOE
You know that for certain --

MAL
Mule won't run with five. I shoulda dumped the girl? Or you? Or Jayne?
   (considering)
Well, Jayne...

ZOE
Coulda tossed the payload.

MAL
And go to Panty and Mingo with air in our mitts, tell 'em "here's your share"? They'd set the dogs on us in the space of a twitch, and there we are back in mortal peril. We get a job, we gotta make good.

Wash enters from the bridge.

ZOE
Sir, I don't disagree on any particular point, it's just... in the time of war, we woulda never left a man stranded.

MAL
Maybe that's why we lost.

She's not happy with the reply. Mal climbs down to his room as Wash reaches Zoe, slides his arms around her.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Once alone, Mal lets his own disappointment show. He pulls off his holster and drops it over a chair. Kicks the toilet closed and sits on his bunk.

The place resembles a submarine cabin, with charts and clutter, ancient maps on the walls.
Mal moves a bunch of papers off his bunk and a picture slides out. Hits the floor and starts moving: it's a snapshot-movie of:

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE - DAY

We're close on a beautiful woman who looks at us with amused exasperation. Behind her is an opulently dressed little shuttle.

INARA
Kaylee, are you ever gonna put that capture down?

KAYLEE (O.S.)
We gotta have records of everything. A bona fide Companion entertained clients on this very ship! In this very bed!

The picture pans over to the bed -- which River is bending over and sniffing curiously. Inara is packing things up.

KAYLEE (O.S.)
(continuing)
For one sweet second, we was almost classy.

INARA
You promised to help me pack.

KAYLEE (O.S.)
Honest, Inara, why do you have to leave?

Inara shoots an uncertain look at the camera -- and the picture freezes, goes back to the beginning.

During all this, Mal has picked it up. He looks at it a moment, tosses it aside. Looks around at nothing much.

JAYNE (V.O.)
I do not get it. How's a guy get so wrong?

INT. CARGO BAY - LATER

We see the doors in the floor slide open, a second set below. Pan to see, for a moment, the dead Reaver's face.

Kaylee is opening the doors with a keypad on a cable. Jayne drags the corpse closer to the doors as he continues:
JAYNE

Ain't logical. Cuttin' on his own face, rapin' and murdering -- I mean, I'll kill a man in a fair fight... or if I think he's gonna start a fair fight, or if he bothers me, or if there's a woman, or I'm gettin' paid -- mostly only when I'm gettin' paid. But these Reavers... last ten years they just show up like the boageyman from stories. Eating people alive? Where does that get fun?

He dumps the body in, she starts the doors closing.

KAYLEE

Shepherd Book said they was men that reached the edge of space, saw a vasty nothingness and just went bibbledy over it.

JAYNE

Hell, I been to the edge. Just looked like more space.

KAYLEE

I don't know. People get awful lonely in the black. Like to get addlepated ourselves, we stay on this boat much longer. Captain'll drive us all off, one by one.

JAYNE

You're just in a whinge cuz that prissy doc is finally disembarking. Me I says good riddance. He never belonged here, and his sister's no saner than one of them Reavers.

KAYLEE

That ain't even so! River's a dear heart and a boon to this crew! You just don't like her 'cause she can read your mind and everything you think is mean.

JAYNE

Well, there is that.
KAYLEE
Her and Simon could have a place here. Now they're leaving us.
Just like Shepherd Book.

She looks up toward one of the shuttles.

KAYLEE
(continuing)
Just like Inara...

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

And here she is, moving back and down into frame, her eyes half closed in passion. She settles on a cluster of brocaded pillows, and we see another head lowering in for a kiss...

Come around to see it's another lovely young woman -- and that there is a group of ten others watching intently, all in saris, on their knees. Two handsome young men with shaved heads in the back, also on their knees.

Inara stops before the kiss, smiling and coming back up. She speaks to the girls (We hear only soft music) as she repositions the one she's with, lowering again; showing her the motion of surrender as if it were a dance step.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
They love you.

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DUSK

Inara looks out at the mountains. The space she's in resembles a Tibetan monastery, if slightly more opulent.

Widen to see she is with SHEYDRA, a somewhat older Companion, the woman whose voice we heard. She hands Inara a drink.

SHEYDRA
The girls. They've learned more from you these last months than the rest of us could show them in two years.

INARA
They're very sweet. But they're not Companions.

SHEYDRA
(wryly)
You've no hope for them? Junk the lot, start anew?
INARA
On Sihnon we started training at twelve. Years of discipline and preparation before the physical act of pleasure was even mentioned. Most of these girls --

SHEYDRA
They're all of good family, the highest academic standards --

INARA
Control. Was the first lesson. And the last and these worlds are not like the Central Planets. There is barbarism dressed up in the most civil weeds. Men of the highest rank who don't know the difference between a Companion and a common whore. It's unsafe.

SHEYDRA
All the more reason the girls look to you. You came out here alone, before the Alliance ever thought to establish a House this remote. You've seen so much. You're a figure of great romance to them.

INARA
Great romance has nothing to do with being a Companion, Sheydra. You should know better.

SHEYDRA
I'm not the one who had a torrid affair with a pirate.

Inara nearly spills her drink.

INARA
A who? With a what?

SHEYDRA
(smiling)
It's the talk of the House. The girls all trade stories in the dorms at night.

INARA
I didn't... have a pirate...
SHEYDRA
In one of the stories you make
love in a burning temple. I think
that's my favorite.

INARA
(sitting)
This is unbearable. Captain
Reynolds is no pirate; he's a
petty thief. And he never laid a
finger on me. All he ever did was
rent me a shuttle and be very
annoying.

(mutters in Chinese)
<A switch to those girls'
backsides is just good enough.>

SHEYDRA
A year on his shuttle and he never
laid a finger on you. No wonder
you left.

INARA
(bridling)
I left because -- go away. We're
no longer friends. You're a
stranger to me now.

SHEYDRA
I do love to watch you boil.
Don't worry. The stories will
fade. And your Captain Reynolds
has probably gotten himself blown
up by this time.

INARA
(looking away again)
Yes. That would be just like him.

EXT. BEAUMONDE: ATOLL PLAZA - EVENING

Serenity touches down on the crowded atoll amidst a number of
other, equally disreputable ships. The place is filled with
every kind of immigrant culture and shop imaginable.

EXT./INT. SERENITY - EVENING

The ramp is open and everyone is filing out, ready to hit the
town. Kaylee is talking to Simon, who has River in hand.

KAYLEE
Don't talk to the barkers -- only
the captains.

(more)
KAYLEE (cont'd)
You look the captain in the eye, know who you're dealing with.

SIMON
I wish there was...

Since he doesn't know what to say, she rattles on:

KAYLEE
You shouldn't aughta be so clean. It's a dead giveaway you don't belong, you always gotta be tidy. Don't pay anybody in advance. And don't ride in anything with a Capissen 38 engine, they fall right out of the sky.

SIMON
Kaylee.

She turns and heads off. Simon starts in the other direction, but River looks after her and the others.

SIMON
(continuing)
River... do you want to stay with them?

RIVER
It's not safe.

SIMON
No, I fear it's not safe anymore.

He's heading off and doesn't hear:

RIVER
For them.

INT. THE MAIDENHEAD - CONTINUING

We start on a CorVue screen, showing a news report. On the screen is a shot of the town our gang robbed, now half of it a smoking ruin.

NEWSPERSON (V.O.)
... that it was a band of Reavers remains unconfirmed. The only survivors of the massacre apparently locked themselves in the Trade Station vault until --
During this we come around to see that the screen has a blinking light behind it, come THROUGH the wiring of the back to look out at the bar, with the word "recording" in the corner. Every screen is a camera, even down here.

We pick up Mal and Kaylee heading down into the bar. Cutting away from the camera's view, we can looks two stories straight down as they go, to a close group of dark tables and booths and a second screen playing in the corner.

MAL
It's not my fault the Doc's got no stomach for Rim living --

KAYLEE
It is entirely and for all your fault! If you'd given Simon a moment, just a moment where he didn't think you were gonna throw them off or turn them in, he might've --

MAL
What? Swept you into his cleanly arms? Made tidy love to you?

They have reached the guncheck, where Jayne and Wash have already checked their guns. It works like a lunch automat: Mal sticks his gun in a drawer, pulls out a chit -- the drawer closes and rotates, revealing another empty one. A large bouncer with a shockrod watches impassively.

KAYLEE
(as they continue down)
Don't you dare joke! You know how much I pined on Simon. And him fair sweet on me, I well believe, but he's so worried about being found out --

ZOE
Captain didn't make 'em fugitives.

KAYLEE
But he coulda made 'em family! Steada driving them off. Steada keeping Simon from seein' I was there, when I carried such a torch and we coulda -- goin' on a year now I ain't had nothin' twixt my nethers weren't run on batteries!
MAL
Oh god! I can't know that!

JAYNE
I could stand to hear a little more...

KAYLEE
If you had a care for anybody's heart you woulda --

MAL
( Enough)
You knew he was gonna leave. We never been but a way station to those two. And how do you know what he feels? He's got River to worry on but he still coulda shown you... if I truly wanted someone bad enough, wouldn't be a thing in the 'verse could stop me from going to her.

KAYLEE
Tell that to Inara.

For a moment, Mal is too shocked to react. Kaylee storms out.

MINGO
Domestic troubles?

MINGO is young, tough -- somewhere between a gangster and a fur-trader. Sounds lower-class British, or something like it.

FANTY
Domestic troubles?

FANTY moves out from behind Mingo to reveal that he is Mingo's identical twin. Apart from slight differences in dress, they are indistinguishable.

MINGO
'Cause we don't wanna interrupt.

FANTY
A man should keep his house in order.

MAL
(greets them each)
Mingo. Fanty.
MINGO
(pointing at his brother)
He's Mingo.

MAL
He's Fanty. You're Mingo.

MINGO
Gahhh! How is it you always know?

MAL
Fanty's prettier.
(pulling out a chair)
Feel to do some business?

MINGO
(re: Mal's gang)
Bit crowded, isn't it? As you see, we come unencumbered by thugs.

MAL
Which means at least four of the guys already in here are yours. All's one. I'll just keep Jayne with me.

ZOE
Sir, are you sure you don't --

MAL
Go. Go get yourselves a nice romantic meal.

WASH
Those are my two favorite words!
(to Zoe)
Honey... "Meal..."

MAL
(to Zoe)
It's business. We're fine.

They leave and the four remaining men sit. Fanty tosses a few coins to a saloon-girl, who does a little fan-dance...

ANGLE: THE CORVUE CAMERA'S POV of the men is conveniently blocked by her little dance.

Mal's foot nudges a duffel bag of money to Mingo's foot.

MINGO
Quite a crew you've got.
MAL
Yeah, they're a fine bunch of ruebens.

MINGO
How you keep them on that crap boat is the subject of much musing tween me and Fanty.

FANTY
We go on and on.

MAL
So I'm noticing. Is there a problem I don't know of? You got 25% of a sweet take kissing your foot, how come we're not dispersing?

FANTY
Our end is forty, precious.

JAYNE
My muscular buttocks it's forty --

MINGO
It is as of now. Find anyone around going cheaper.

FANTY
Find anyone around going near a sorry lot like you in the first instance.

ANGLE: RIVER has entered, is looking about.

Jayne sees her, nudges Mal, who looks and turns back to business. We stay on her as she wanders around the perimeter of the bar, vaguely listening in on Mal's deal.

FANTY
(continuing)
You're unlikable, Mal. You got no respect for us above you, you got enemies in every quadrant, and your ship's older than the starting point of time. You's charity cases to such as us.
MAL
Well here's a foul thought. I
conjured you two were incompetent;
sent us out not knowing there were
Reavers about. Now I'm thinking
you picked us out because you did.

MINGO
That were a sign of faith, boy.
And it doesn't affect our forty
per. Danger is, after all, your
business.

JAYNE
Reavers ain't business, double
dickless.

This is all background noise to River, who has moved to the
CV screen, on which is a commercial. It's animated, goofy,
cartoon animals and anime-style Asian girls all transforming
to insane fantasy figures as they sing about:

COMMERCIAL
FRUITY OATY BARS, POW! HEY! FRUITY
BARS, MAKE A MAN OF A MOUSE, MAKE
YOU BUST OUT YOUR BLOUSE, EAT THEM
NOW, BANG! PING! ZOW! -- TRY
FRUITY, OATY BARS.

We push in, the light from the CV on River's face, pushing to
EXTREME CLOSE UP, all noise but the jingle fading out,
finally that as well, just the hum in River's ears.

And she whispers:

RIVER
Miranda.

She turns and looks back at the crowd.

What happens next happens very fast.

She strides silently to the first table -- two men drinking
quietly -- and she slams her foot into one's face, then whips
it back into the other's, knocking them both unconscious as --

-- people are turning, just registering that this girl --

-- kicks the table into a card player even as she sweeps a
bottle off it behind her -- the bottle hits a man behind her
square in the face, a man she never even looked at -- people
are rising, fleeing or pushing forward --
MAL
River...

JAYNE
Whuhuh?

She's taking out a group of four, high kicks and perfect precision -- Two men come from either side, one whipping out a knife -- she does a perfect split, grabs his wrist above her head, using his momentum to stab the other one --

Mal fights to get back to the gunrack. The bouncer reaches her and she wrests his shockrod from him, uses it on him, on Fanty and Mingo -- the fan-dancer is bolting and River hurls the rod at her head, knocks her cold...

She's everywhere. On tables, chairs, under your legs, using the room itself to take out every single person there. One man hides behind a wall -- impossibly, she swings her leg around the corner and nails his face.

Jayne grabs her from behind --

JAYNE
(continuing)
Gorrammit, girl, it's me!

She grabs his crotch and squeezes -- his grip loosens and she spins, facing him, and flat-heels his nose with her palm, twirling into a gut kick that doubles him over, dispatching of another while she cracks Jayne's head with a small table --

Somebody pulls a gun and she snaps his elbow, causing him to scream out even before he shoots himself in the gut --

Mal frantically wrests a gun from the vending locker as River knocks the other guy's gun in the air, kicks someone else and then catches it, whips it around just as Mal comes up with his, they are pointed right at each other --

SIMON
Eta Kooram Nah Smeech!

And River drops to the ground, fast asleep.

There is a beat. Mal looks around the bar. He and Simon, who has run up to the entrance, are the only ones standing.

He looks down at River. She lies unconscious, helpless.

MAL
I think maybe we ought to leave.
EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We see two sleek warships glide silently into frame, followed by a third, bigger ship. This is the Operative's vessel, and it is everything Serenity is not: sleek, predatory, icy cool.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

The Operative is looking at the Maidenhead security feed -- and River is staring right at him.

THE OPERATIVE
(captivated)
Hello again. Yes, it's me. I'm glad you've finally asked for me.

An Ensign is revealed looking at a separate monitor:

ENSIGN
We got a pos on a retinal -- man carrying her out is Malcolm Reynolds, captains a Firefly-class transport ship, "Serenity". Bound by law five times, smuggling, tariff dodge... not convicted. Nothing here that would --

THE OPERATIVE
The ship. The name of the ship.
(softly)
Crossref. Malcolm Reynolds. Serenity.

He looks over at the Ensign with a small, strange smile on his lips -- as his glasses are covered by text.

ENSIGN
Sir?

THE OPERATIVE
Serenity Valley. Bloodiest battle of the entire war. The Independents held the valley for seven weeks, two of them after their high command had surrendered. 68% casualty rate.

ENSIGN
Of course, Sir, I just didn't --

THE OPERATIVE
There.
His glasses stop scrolling and Mal's military file opens, a picture of Mal in one lens.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
If the feds ever bothered to crossref justice files with war records... Yes. Our Mr. Reynolds was a sergeant, 57th Overlanders. Volunteer. Fought at Serenity till the very last. This man is an issue. This man hates us.

ENSIGN
First Mate Zoe Washburn, formerly Corporal Zoe Alleyne, also in the 57th. Career army, looks like.

THE OPERATIVE
She's followed him far... Give me the crew, registered passengers -- Our Captain is a passionate man, no room there for subtlety. He's bound to have some very obvious...

CLOSE ON: THE LENS of his glasses. On it is a slowly moving picture of INARA.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
...weakness...

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT
River is still asleep, Mal finishing chaining her wrists. She lies on her side, breathing evenly.

Mal stares at her a moment, then:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING
He exits to find the whole group waiting for him, sans Wash.

SIMON
May I see her?

MAL
She's still napping just now. And I believe you've got some storytelling to do.
WASH
(entering)
We're out of atmo, plotted for
Haven. No one following as of yet.

KAYLEE
Haven? We're gonna see Shepherd
Book?

MAL
(nodding)
We got to lay low. And I could
fair use some spiritual guidance
right about now.
(to Simon)
I am a lost lamb; what in hell
happened back there?

WASH
Start with the part where Jayne
gets knocked out by a ninety pound
girl. 'Cause I don't think that's
ever getting old.

ZOE
Do we know if anyone was killed?

MAL
It's likely. I know she meant to
kill me 'fore the Doc put her to
sleep, which how exactly does that
work anyhow?

SIMON
Safeword.
(beat)
The people who helped me break
River out -- they had intel that
River and the other subjects were
being embedded with behavioral
conditioning. They taught me a
safeword, in case... something
happened.

KAYLEE
Not sure I get it.

SIMON
A phrase that's encoded in her
brain, that makes her fall asleep.
If I speak the words, "Eta --
JAYNE
(jumping back)
Well don't say it!

ZOE
It only works on her, Jayne.

JAYNE
Oh. Well, now I know that.

MAL
"In case something happened."

SIMON
What?

MAL
You feel to elaborate on what that something might be? I mean they taught you that fancy safeword, they must've figured she was gonna, what -- start uncontrollably crocheting?

SIMON
They never said what --

MAL
And you never did ask.

Mal grabs him and throws him against the wall, in his face.

MAL
(continuing)
Eight months. Eight months you had her on my boat knowing full well she might go monkeyshit at the wrong word and you never said a thing --

SIMON
I brought her out here so they couldn't get to her, I don't even know how they --

MAL
My ship. My crew: You had a gorrann timebomb living with us!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

River's eyes open.
INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL
What if she went off in the middle of dinner, or in bunk with Kaylee, did that give you a moment's pause?

Simon looks at Kaylee, the truth of Mal's words hitting him.

SIMON
I thought she was getting better.

JAYNE
And I thought they was gettin' off!
(off looks)
Didn't we have a intricate plan how they was gonna be not here anymore?

KAYLEE
We couldn't leave them now...!

JAYNE
No, now that she's a... killer woman we ought be bringin' 'em tea and dumplings!
(to Mal)
In earnest, Mal: why'd you bring her back on?

Mal looks at Jayne, at all of them. Doesn't have an answer.

SIMON
May I see her.

Mal steps aside. Simon enters the locker.

JAYNE
She goes woolly again, we're gonna have to put a bullet to her.

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

River mouths the next words right along with Mal:

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

MAL
It's crossed my mind.

WASH
Can I make a suggestion that doesn't involve violence, or is this the wrong crowd?
ZOE

Honey...

WASH

Fanty and Mingo might be coming hard down on us, or the laws... or maybe nobody could be bunged about a little social brawl. We need to get our bearings. I think we need to talk to Mr. Universe.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

The camera swoops in at a sparkling ion cloud, then through the cloud at a barren, metallic satellite moon. Then further in to reveal a sprawling -- and completely empty -- communications complex. Giant satellite dishes everywhere.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

Inside, we find an unkempt young man. Also sleep-deprived, over-caffeinated and kinda sweet. This is MR UNIVERSE. He is alone but for his mannikin-like Love-bot, Lenore.

He's surrounded by screens, computers, feeds -- machinery that looks both ultra-modern and long neglected. All the screens play different images -- it's a mediaverse.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

As he watches the security feed of River's fight his image becomes a vidscreen. He's addressing Wash, Mal and Zoe.

We intercut between the two spaces:

MR UNIVERSE

Oh, this is good. This is...

(giggles)

...she's beating up all the burly men and I'm having a catharsis, it's happening right now, you guys always bring me the very best violence. You think you're in a hot place?

WASH

That's what we're looking to learn. Is there any follow up, a newwave...
MR UNIVERSE
There is no "news", there's the
truth of the signal, what I see,
and there's the puppet theatre the
Parliament's jesters foist on the
somnambulant public. Monkey taught
to say the word "monkey" -- lead
story on 32 planets. But the slum
riots on Hera, not a --

MAL
What about this? Did this make
the... puppet theatre?

MR UNIVERSE
No sir. And no lawforce flags,
either -- I hadda go into the
security feed direct...

MAL
You can do that?

MR UNIVERSE
Can't stop the signal, Mal.
Everything goes somewhere and I go
everywhere. Security feeds are a
traipse to access -- and I wasn't
the first one in, this has prints
on it -- oh! Look at her go!
Everyone is getting bruises and
contusions. Contooosions.

ZOE
(to Mal, over that)
So somebody else has been fed
this. That doesn't like me too
well.

MR UNIVERSE
Zoe, you sultry minx, stop falling
in love with me. You're just
gonna embarrass yourself. I have
a commitment to my Lovebot, it was
a very beautiful ceremony, Lenore
wrote her own vows, I cried like
a baby, a hungry, angry baby.
(re: screen)
And she falls asleep. Which, she
would be sleepy.
MAL
Can you go back? See if anybody
spoke with her 'fore she acted up,
made any kind of contact with
her...

Mr Universe works the screen. The image rewinds and stops on
River coming up to it, looking at it. She whispers the word,
"Miranda", and starts to move away.

MAL
(continuing)
Miranda...? Go back further.

MR UNIVERSE
No...

He pulls another screen close, starts working that one.
Matching timecodes, he pulls up the commercial.

MAL
Um... please?

Mr Universe has a third screen showing the commercial as
well -- and it starts breaking down, bursts of (non-matrixy)
code showing through. As he does so:

MR UNIVERSE
Friends and potential lovers, I
have good news and I have the
other kind. Good is you're very
smart. Someone is talking to her.

WASH
The oaty bar?

MAL
Subliminal. It's a subliminal
message broadwaved to trigger her.

MR UNIVERSE
(nodding)
I been seeing this code pop up all
over, last few weeks. And I
cannot crack it. It's Alliance
and it's high military, so here
then is the bad. Someone has gone
to enormous trouble to find your
little friend. And found her
they have.

Mal, Zoe and Wash look at each other.
MR UNIVERSE
(continuing)
Do you all know what it is you're carrying?

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River stares at us, impassive, as the camera pulls away from her to reveal Simon, who is cleaning blood off her face.

RIVER
They're afraid of me.

SIMON
I'm sorry...

RIVER
They should be. What I will show them... Oh God...

She starts tearing up, breathing faster... Simon runs his hands through her hair.

SIMON
It's okay, it's okay...

RIVER
(somewhere else)
Show me off like a dog, old men covered in blood, it never touched them but they're drowning in it... so much loss... I don't know what I'm saying. I never know what I'm saying...

SIMON
You said something. When you were triggered, do you remember? The Captain saw you say something on the feed...

RIVER
Miranda.

SIMON
Miranda.

RIVER
(laughs bitterly)
Ask her. She'll show you all.
SIMON
Show us what? Who is Miranda?
(beat)
Am I... talking to Miranda now?

She shoots him a look.

RIVER
I'm not a multiple, dumbo.

SIMON
No. Right. But I think somehow when they triggered you it brought this up, this memory --

RIVER
It isn't mine. The memory. I didn't bring it and I shouldn't have to carry it, it isn't mine.
(urgently:)
Don't make me sleep again.

SIMON
I won't.

RIVER
Put a bullet to me. Bullet in the brain pan, squish.

SIMON
Don't say that. Not ever. We'll get through this.

She reaches out and touches his face, affectionately.

RIVER
Things are going to get much much worse.

SIMON
Well, the Captain hasn't tossed us in the airlock, so I'd say we're --

RIVER
He has to see. More than anyone... he has to see what he doesn't want to.

SIMON
River. What will Miranda show us.

She thinks.
RIVER
Death.

SIMON
Whose death?

And she starts laughing. Quietly at first, then louder, then almost uncontrollably, screaming in his face:

RIVER
EVERYBODY'S!!!

SMASH CUT TO:

Black Silence.

INT. CAVE - DAY

It's pitch black here, til Serenity's lights throw a hard relief on the rocky wall. She flies in after, slow and steady, revealing herself to be in a huge mineshaft.

BOOK (O.S.)
Lord, I am walking your way.

ANGLE: THE RAMP lowers to reveal Shepherd BOOK, a working-class preacher and former crew member. He smiles as they come out to meet him:

BOOK (O.S.)
(continuing)
Let me in, for my feet are sore, my clothes are ragged.

EXT. MINING CAMP - DAY

We see the camp: a few shacks and a working mine, as our group come down to it, greeted by a few miners, including an eight year old boy that rushes to Kaylee...

ANGLE ON: A CANNON mounted at the edge of town. The guy manning it sees them arrive, also goes to greet them.

INT. COMMUNITY KITCHEN - NIGHT

We see the gang sitting and eating. Comfortable, even laughing a bit. Jayne presents Book with a couple of cigars. Kaylee hoists the boy on her lap.

BOOK (O.S.)
Look in my eyes, Lord, and my sins will play out on them as on a screen. Read them all.
EXT. MINING CAMP - NIGHT

Mal approaches Book on the edge of a rise overlooking the town. Mal has a bowl and chopsticks. Book is finishing:

BOOK
Forgive what you can, and send me on my path. I will walk on, until you bid me rest.

MAL
Hope that ain't for me, Shepherd.

BOOK
(lighting a cigar)
It's prayer for the dead.

MAL
Then I really hope it ain't for me.

BOOK
It's for the men River might have killed in that bar.

MAL
Weren't River that did it, you know that. Somebody decided her brain was just another piece of property to take, fenced it right up.

BOOK
You got a plan?

MAL
Hiding ain't a plan?

BOOK
It'll do you for a spell, and the folks here'll be glad of the extra coin...

MAL
...but they'll be coming. Alliance is after this girl with a powerful will. I look to hear the tromp of their boots any moment.
BOOK
You won't.
(off Mal's look)
This isn't a palms-up military run, Mal. No reports broadwaved, no warrants... much as they want her, they want her hid. That means Closed File. Means an Operative, which is trouble you've not known.

MAL
I coulda left her there.

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT
As he continues, we see an image of him watching over the sleeping girl, his mind racing.

MAL (O.S.)
I had an out -- hell, I had every reason in the 'verse to leave her lay and haul anchor.

EXT. MINING CAMP - CONTINUING

BOOK
Not your way, Mal.

MAL
I have a way?
(thinks)
Is that better than a plan?

BOOK
You can play the thug all you want, but there's more to you than you're ever like to 'fess.

MAL
You just think that 'cause my eyes is all sorrowful and pretty.

BOOK
Only one thing is gonna walk you through this, Mal. Belief.

MAL
Sermons make me sleepy, Shepherd. I ain't looking for help from on high. That's a long wait for a train don't come.
BOOK
When I talk about belief, why do you always assume I'm talking about God?
(Mal has no response)
They'll come at you sideways.

As he continues, we see:

EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY
Inara stands waiting, her back to us, in front of the very vista we first saw her before.
The Operative comes slowly up the staircase, stands before her.

BOOK (V.O.)
It's how they think: sideways.
It's how they move. Sidle up and smile, hit you where you're weak.

EXT. MINING CAMP - CONTINUING

BOOK
Sorta man they're like to send believes hard. Kills and never asks why.

MAL
It's of interest to me how much you seem to know about that world.

BOOK
I wasn't born a Shepherd, Mal.

MAL
Have to tell me about that some time.

BOOK
(looking out)
No I don't.

He walks away, offering this:

BOOK
(continuing)
Sideways.

Mal watches him go, thinking.
EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The Teacher from the very beginning is standing in front of River, whose desktop screen depicts a single, dark planet.

TEACHER
River?

Eight-year-old River is working away, not paying attention.

TEACHER
(continuing)
River, you look tired. I think everybody's a little tired by now; why don't we all lie down.

River looks up, scared. All the other children wordlessly get up from their seats and lie on the floor next to them.

TEACHER
(continuing)
A little peace and quiet will make everything better.

She starts to lie down herself, right on the grass.

RIVER
No...

TEACHER
River. Do as you're told. It's going to be fine. Lie down.

RIVER
NO!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - NIGHT

River starts awake.

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

Mal does too, shirtless on his bunk.

MAL
Whuh huh nuhwhat?

WASH (O.S.)
(for the third time)
MAL! You up? Got a wave. I'm a bounce it down to you.

He pops up, turns to the screen as the white noise becomes:
MAL

Inara.

REVERSE ON: Inara on Mal's screen. We see her from about chest level up. She, presumably, sees the same.

INARA
Mal. I uh, is this a bad time?

MAL
Good as any.

INARA
Please tell me you're wearing pants.

MAL
(slight grin)
Naked as the day I come cryin'. How's your world?

INARA
Cold. It's autumn here.

MAL
Still at the Training House?

INARA
Right where you left me.

MAL
I remember it as nice enough. Picturesque.

INARA
It is that. What about you?

MAL
Still flying. So what occasions the wave? Not that to see you ain't... well you look very fine...

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Zoe and Wash are secretly watching both Mal and Inara on two different screens, smiling at their formal shyness.

Jayne enters, wondering what's up...
INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

INARA
Oh. Thank you, I... I guess we have something of a problem here. With the locals, I thought maybe...

MAL
You could use a gun hand?

INARA
I'm hoping not. But if you were close at all, you -- the crew -- could take your ease here a while... and there'd be payment...

MAL
Payment is never not a factor. I could sound out the crew... This pot like to boil over soon?

INARA
Soon. Not right away.

MAL
Well, it would be, I mean I would like to... Kaylee's been missing you something fierce --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

There is a general groan among the audience, which now includes Kaylee as well...

KAYLEE
Oh they're so pathetic!

INT. MAL'S ROOM - CONTINUING

INARA
I miss her too. I even miss my shuttle, occasionally.

MAL
Yeah, you left a... got some of your stuff in a trunk, never did get a chance to drop it off.

INARA
Oh.

MAL
I didn't look through the... stuff... just sundries I expect.
Inara smiles blandly, nods. An awkward beat.

MAL
(continuing)
Well, it's kind of late where I'm at. I'll send a wave as soon as I can.

INARA
Thank you.

She disappears. Mal thinks a moment.

INT. BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mal comes up in, buttoning his shirt.

WASH
Inara. Nice to see her again.

ZOE
So, trap?

MAL
Trap.

ZOE
We goin' in?

MAL
It ain't but a few hours out...

WASH
Yeah, but, remember the part where it's a trap?

MAL
If that's the case, then Inara's already caught in it. She wouldn't set us up willing. Might be we got a shot at seeing who's turning these wheels. We go in.

KAYLEE
How can you be sure Inara don't just wanna see you? Sometimes people have feelings -- I'm referring here to people...

MAL
Y'all were watching, I take it.

Guilty glances.
KAYLEE
Yes.

MAL
You see us fight?

KAYLEE
No.

MAL
Trap.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

The ship moves gracefully over the mountains.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH
We're about seventy miles from the Training house. And nobody on radar... if the Alliance is about, they're laying low.

MAL
They're about. Find us a home. I'll take the shuttle in closer. Zoe, ship is yours.

He starts out, turns back to Zoe.

MAL
(continuing)
Remember: if anything happens to me, or you don't hear from me within the hour... you take this ship and you come and rescue me.

ZOE
What? And risk my ship?

MAL
(exiting)
I mean it. It's cold out there. I don't wanna get left.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

She is nestled in a gorge, overhanging rocks all but burying her from view. The shuttle on the right lifts off from the side of the ship and glides off, keeping low.
EXT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

A line of young trainees files by in robes and red shawls pulled over their heads -- one trainee a good deal larger than the others.

INT. INARA'S ROOM - LATER

She is kneeling in front of a statue of Buddha, lighting a few incense sticks.

The room is sparsely lush -- not as opulent as the shuttle where she entertained men, but still beautifully furnished and draped. A lace curtain hangs in front of the light, casting its pattern in shadow over everything. Including the rather large figure in a red shawl who kneels beside Inara.

MAL
Dear Buddha, please send me a pony, and a plastic rocket, and --

INARA
Mal! What are you doing here?

MAL
You invited me.

INARA
I never thought for a second you'd be stupid enough to come!

MAL
Well that makes you kind of a tease, doesn't it?

INARA
You knew my invitation wasn't on the level --

MAL
Which led me to the conclusion that you must be in some trouble.

INARA
I'm fine! I'm... giddy.

MAL
For a woman schooled in telling men what they wanna hear, you ain't much of a liar.

INARA
Mal, you cannot handle this man.
THE OPERATIVE
(entering)
I have to say, I'm impressed that you would come for her yourself. And that you would make it this far in that outfit.

MAL
(standing)
I can be very graceful when I need to.

THE OPERATIVE
I've no doubt.

Mal sheds his shawl and robe. Inara kneels at the alter, picks out another incense stick.

MAL
What are you doing?

INARA
I'm praying for you, Mal.

THE OPERATIVE
That's very thoughtful. But I mean it when I say you're not in any danger.

MAL
Speak your piece.

THE OPERATIVE
I think you're beginning to understand how dangerous River Tam is.

MAL
She is a mite unpredictable. Mood swings, of a sort.

THE OPERATIVE
It's worse than you know.

MAL
It usually is.

THE OPERATIVE
That girl will rain destruction down on you and your ship. She's an albatross, Captain.
MAL
Way I remember it, albatross was
a ship's good luck... til some
idiot killed it.
(to Inara)
Yes, I've read a poem. Try not to
faint.

The Operative moves further into the room. Whenever he
moves, Mal counters.

THE OPERATIVE
I've seen your war record. I know
how you must feel about the
Alliance.

MAL
You really don't.

THE OPERATIVE
Fair to say. But I have to hope
you understand you can't beat us.

MAL
I got no need to beat you. I just
wanna go my way.

THE OPERATIVE
And you can do that, once you let
me take the girl back home. Give
me the opportunity to help you.

MAL
All I gotta do is let you take one
more thing away from me. I've had
a lot of things taken in my time.
And it may just be that this is
one too many.

THE OPERATIVE
This psychotic, potentially
murderous girl who can't have the
slightest awareness of your
protection. This is where you
"draw the line".

MAL
Well I'm a whimsical soul.

THE OPERATIVE
There's a number of lives that
hang in the balance here. Lives
under your care. Are they as
whimsical as yourself?
MAL
I got no notion that I'm being
heroical at all. Any more than I
think you're really just a
harmless bureaucrat come to help
me out. You move like a killer.

The Operative is stopped by this. Unhappily, he continues:

THE OPERATIVE
I have a warship in deep orbit,
Captain. We locked on to
Serenity's pulse beacon the moment
you hit atmo. I can speak a word
and send a missile to that exact
location inside of three minutes.

Mal pulls a small device, clipped wires sticking out all
around it, and tosses it to the Operative.

MAL
You do that, best make peace with
your dear and fluffy lord.

THE OPERATIVE
Pulse beacon.

MAL
Advice from an old tracker: you
wanna find someone, use your eyes.

THE OPERATIVE
How long do you think you can
really run from us?

MAL
Oh, a jack-rabbit, me. 'Sides, I
never credited the Alliance with
an over-abundance of brains. And
if you're the best they got...

THE OPERATIVE
Captain Reynolds, I should tell
you so that you don't waste your
time: You can't make me angry.

INARA
Oh please. Spend an hour with him.

Mal smiles -- then glares at Inara, mouthing "Hey!"
THE OPERATIVE
I need her, Captain. River is...
my purpose and I will gather her
to me. The brother as well.
Whatever else happens is
incidental. In the greater scheme.

MAL
Why is it that the greater scheme
always makes everything not that
great?

THE OPERATIVE
I want to resolve this like
civilized men. I'm not
threatening you. I'm unarmed.

MAL
Great!

He draws and shoots the Operative in the chest. The
Operative goes down as Mal grabs Inara, moves for the doorway.
The Operative is on him in a second, choke-hold from behind.

THE OPERATIVE
I am of course wearing full body
armor. I'm not a moron.

He tosses Mal hard against a wall, spinning and blocking a
blow from Inara -- she is clearly trained in martial arts,
but he flat-heels her to the ground within seconds.

Mal is going for his gun again, turning, and the Operative
kicks him in the face, sends him back, gun flying. Mal gets
to his feet and they square off. Mal breathing hard, nose
dripping blood. The Operative perfectly poised, waiting.

MAL
No back up? We're making an awful
ruckus...

THE OPERATIVE
They'll come when they're needed.

MAL
I'd start whistling.

THE OPERATIVE
Captain, what do you think is
going to happen here?

They come at each other. The Operative is the much better
trained -- he's fluid, his blows sparse and deadly.
Mal is more bluster and determination, and the Operative's precision is wearing Mal down.

Mal punches wild -- the Operative counters with a spin-kick to the head that sends Mal to the ground not far from Inara, breathing hard. He tries to rise again, painfully, but Inara places her hand on his arm.

The Operative goes to his briefcase by the door, pulls out his sword. His face has taken on that remote kind of fascination as he looks at it.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
Nothing here is what it seems.

INARA
I know.

THE OPERATIVE
He's not the plucky hero. The Alliance isn't some evil empire. This isn't the grand arena.

INARA
And that's not incense.

He turns to look: the incense stick burns away -- rather like a fuse -- and FLASHES in an explosion of light and sound.

It's a flash-bomb: The Operative sails back as everything goes smoky white and the sound dies to a tiny buzz.

The Operative tries to get his bearings -- and four armored soldiers are in his face, asking him for orders... Mal and Inara are gone. He motions for the men to follow them.

THE OPERATIVE
Just a flash bomb. Go! Go!

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - CONTINUING

Inara leads Mal (who is reholstering his gun) down some steps and along a corridor. The sound is still tinny and weird.

MAL
...I had him...

INARA
What?

MAL
(deafly loud)
I think that I was winning!
EXT. SIDE OF MOUNTAIN, BY MAL'S SHUTTLE - DAY

Mal and Inara move quickly down the mountain. They look to see that Mal's shuttle has four Alliance guards waiting by it. Mal ducks back out of sight, pulls a fancy-looking grenade out of his pocket. Pops the top and hurls it over at the foursome.

CLOSE ON: THE GRENADE, as a series of bars of light go out one by one, counting down --

ALLIANCE SOLDIER
Grenade!

Everybody dives for cover. The moment they do, Mal and Inara race into the shuttle, Mal sweeping up the grenade just as the last light goes out and nothing happens.

One soldier turns to look and Mal shoots him back down as the door shuts on him and Inara.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Inara pushes into the pilot's seat.

INARA
Hang on to something.

MAL
You sure you remember how it --

He nearly falls over as:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - CONTINUING

The shuttle shoots straight up, spinning and heading out.

INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

Inara stares straight ahead, relaxing her grip on the controls. Mal is gone.

INARA
I told you to hang on.

MAL (O.S.)
(in great pain)
I'm fine...

EXT. SPACE - LATER

We are below Serenity as her bay doors are closing, six little objects floating out of her belly like roe.
These objects are roughly the size of pony-kegs, and clearly home-made, parts welded together almost haphazardly. They all spark silently to life -- and shoot off in six different directions, as Serenity herself fires up her Firefly effect and burns away from us.

INT. COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE - DAY

The Operative sips tea and rubs his temple.

THE OPERATIVE
(into a com)
Forget the pulse beacon, there has to be another way to track the ship -- get a read on the nav sat. It's a registered transport, you must be able to locate --

ENSIGN (O.S.)
Sir?

THE OPERATIVE
Have you found a nav sat trajectory?

ENSIGN (O.S.)
Sir... we've found seven.

The Operative looks more unhappy than angry.

THE OPERATIVE
(to himself)
Does he think this is a game?

EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher and students sleep as River -- as we saw her in the institute, older, with blood seeping from the needle-holes in her head -- makes her way through them.

Slowly she walks to the floating lecture screen. On it is the solar system, glowing lines connecting all the stars and planets. She becomes wide-eyed, breathing hard as it pushes in to one system, one planet...

She looks over to one side of the tent, and we see:

INT. LAB - CONTINUING

Her POV is of the lab. There stand some five older men in formal dress. They stare at her, impassive.

We see flashes of corpses, lying in houses, in city streets -- and a Reaver's screaming face --
INT. STORAGE LOCKER - DAY

And River awakens. A moment to get her bearings, then her eyes narrow with intent.

INARA (V.O.)
We have every reason to be afraid.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

JAYNE
Why, 'cause this guy beat up Mal?
That ain't so hard --

MAL
He didn't beat me up --

INARA
Because he's a believer.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP, A DARK CABIN

As Inara continues, we see: Panty and Mingo, tied to chairs. Light spills onto their bruised faces as the Operative enters.

INARA (V.O.)
He's intelligent, methodical and devout in his belief that killing River is the right thing to do.

INT. PASSENGER DORM - CONTINUING

INARA
I honestly think the only reason we haven't been blown out of the air is that he needs to see her.

SIMON
Needs to see her why?

INARA
I'm uncertain. I would say to be sure of the kill, but... I just know he'll kill us all to get to her.

JAYNE
So no hope of a reward, huh?

ZOE
Did he mention a deal of any kind?
MAL
(looking at Simon)
Give the two of them up. Go my way.

JAYNE
Which you was all ready to do not a day ago. What went sour?

MAL
Cutting them loose ain't the same as handing them over.

JAYNE
That so? 'Cause the corpse I'm about to become is having trouble telling the difference.

SIMON
(to Inara)
Did he say anything about a "Miranda"?

INARA
What is that?

MAL
Don't know who or what, but it's on River's mind. Conjure it might be the reason he's after her.

INARA
You think maybe it poses some kind of threat to the Alliance?

WASH
Do we care? Are we caring about that?

JAYNE
You dumbass hogs, the only people she's a threat to is us on this boat!

INT. STORAGE LOCKER - CONTINUING

River is near the ceiling, keeping herself up in a split again, feet against the walls. There is a wire mesh cover to the light, and she has bent part of it out, is working it inside the lock of her shackles.
INT. PASSENGER DORM - MOMENTS LATER

MAL
Look, we get back to Haven in a few hours time --

JAYNE
Hiding under the Shepherd's skirts, that's a manful scheme --

MAL
You wanna run this ship?

JAYNE
Yes!

MAL
(small beat)
Well you can't!

JAYNE
Do a damn sight better job'n you. Getting us lashed over a couple of strays...
(to Simon)
No offense, Doc, I think it's noble as a grape the way you look to River, but she ain't my sister
(to Mal)
and she ain't your crew. Oh, and neither is she exactly helpless! So where's it writ we gotta lay down our lives for her, which is what you've steered us toward.

MAL
I didn't start this.

JAYNE
No, the Alliance starts the war -- and then you volunteer. Battle of Serenity, Mal: besides Zoe here, how many --
(Mal turns away)
-- I'm talkin' at you -- how many men in your platoon came out of there alive?

Mal stares at him.

ZOE
(dead cold)
You wanna leave this room.
JAYNE
You're damn right I do.

He stalks upstairs. There's a quiet moment.

INARA
This isn't the war, Mal.

Mal turns, eyeing her.

MAL
Are you telling me that because you think I don't know --

INARA
You came to the training house looking for a fight.

MAL
I came looking for you.

INARA
I just want to know who I'm dealing with. I've seen too many versions of you to be sure.

MAL
I start fighting a war I guarantee you'll see something new.

Mal walks out into the cargo bay, Inara following, over:

SIMON
We'll get off. River and I'll get off at Haven and find some --

KAYLEE
Nobody's saying that.

WASH
Nobody besides Jayne is saying that.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Inara tries to catch up to --

INARA
Mal.
MAL
(turning)
I got no answers for you, Inara.
I got no rudder. Wind blows
northerly, I go north. That's who
I am. Maybe that ain't a man to
lead but they have to follow so
you wanna tear me down do it
inside your own mind.

INARA
I'm not trying to tear you down --

MAL
But you fog things up. You always
have -- you spin me about. I wish
like hell you was elsewhere.

INARA
I was.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUING

Jayne is looking at the storage locker door. A beat.

JAYNE
<Enough of this nonsense.>

He moves to the aft hall, shuts and locks the door. Goes
back to the locker and starts to unlock it, pulling his gun.

JAYNE
(continuing)
No trouble now, little crazy
person... we're going for a nice
shuttle ride --

He opens the door and she is on him in an instant, whip blow
to the throat, the nose -- he fires wildly as she jumps on
him, wraps her arms around his neck and topples him back --

INT. AFT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The crew enters, drawn by the shots. Mal is first -- can't
open the door. Looks in to see an unconscious Jayne...

MAL
The other way! Find her and do
not engage!

Everyone piles out the other way. Simon remains, to look in
the window.
ANGLE: SIMON'S POV: There is Jayne, not moving -- and River pops up right in front of us.

He starts, then waits as she opens the door.

SIMON
   It's gonna be oka --

She elbows his throat viciously. He drops to his knees, shocked and gasping, as she spin-kicks him to the ground. He doesn't move. She looks at him a moment, then takes off.

INT. CARGO BAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mal is throwing his shoulder against the bolted door to the upstairs. He gives up, looking around.

ZOE
   She's sealed off the bridge. I do not like her there.

KAYLEE
   Cap'n!

She tosses him a bolt remover. He starts pulling a bolt out of a panel on the wall, tells Zoe:

MAL
   Check the shuttles. She coulda snuck in.

He pops the panel off and starts wriggling in among the wires.

INT. FOREDECK HALL/BRIDGE - LATER

A floor panel hinges open, Mal pulling himself up. He moves quietly to the bridge, gun drawn.

He enters to find River frantically punching up coordinates on a big Cortex screen she's pulled out by the copilot's seat. She whips Jayne's gun at his face, never looking at him. A moment, and Mal lowers his own gun.

MAL
   The government's man, he says you're a danger to us. Not worth helping. Is he right? Are you anything but a weapon? I've staked my crew's life on the theory that you're a person, actual and whole, and if I'm wrong you'd best shoot me now.  

   (she cocks the gun)  
   Or we could talk more...
RIVER
(pointing to screen)
Miranda.

It's a planet. Matches the one from her dream.

INT. BRIDGE - LATER

Everyone has gathered. Wash is piloting now, as they are in atmosphere. River is by Simon. She moves restlessly, upset.

KAYLEE
How can it be there's a whole planet called Miranda and none of us knew of that?

MAL
Because there isn't one. It's a blackrock. Uninhabitable. Terraforming didn't hold, or somesuch. Few settlers died.

RIVER
(to Simon)
I had to show them. I didn't know if you were going to make me sleep.

SIMON
(hoarse whisper)
You could've asked...

KAYLEE
(re: planet)
Wait a tick, yeah! Some ten years back, before the war. There was call for workers to settle on Miranda, my daddy talked about going. I should've recalled...

WASH
But there's nothing about it on the Cortex -- History, Astronomy... it's not in there.

MAL
Half of writing history is hiding the truth. There's something on this rock the Alliance doesn't want known.

INARA
That's right at the edge of the Burnham Quadrant, right?

(more)
INARA (cont'd)
Furthest planet out.
(Mal nods)
It's not that far from here...

WASH
Whoah, no, no --

ZOE
(moving to the screen)
That's a bad notion --

WASH
Honey...

ZOE
I got it, baby.

WASH
Show them the bad...

She hits some commands on the screen, pulls back to reveal a couple of other planets near Miranda.

ZOE
This is us, see? And here's Miranda. All along here, this dead space in between, that's Reaver territory.

WASH
They just float out there, sending out raiding parties --

ZOE
Maybe a hundred ships. And more every year. You go through that you're signing up to be a banquet.

WASH
I'm on board with the run and hide scenario -- and we are just about...

He looks at his monitors, looks ahead...

WASH
(continuing)
Wait...

EXT. MINING CAMP - DAY

The ship swings around a mountain to come into view of the camp.
It is a world of fire.

Every building burns, some blown right apart. Bodies litter the scene, not one of them moving. There's a grounded Alliance ship not far from the cannon that shot it down.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

We see Mal's face as the sight hits him like a gut-punch.

EXT. MINING CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The crew pours out even as the ramp lowers, going off in all directions, calling out to people...

Kaylee heads for the burning church.

KAYLEE
Shepherd? Shepherd Book!

She stops, looking at the ground by the steeple. There is the body on the ground, face down. The child she played with at dinner. Kaylee stares, at first uncomprehending.

ANGLE: MAL, moving in the other direction, approaches the cannon, Jayne behind him. He stops and sees:

Book, lying by the cannon, torn up badly from the waist down.

MAL
(to Jayne)
Get the Doc.

He moves to the Shepherd, grabs his searching hand.

MAL
(continuing)
Shepherd... Don't move.

BOOK
Won't go far...

MAL
Shouldn't've been you. I'm so sorry, it was... they should've hit us. They should've hit me.

BOOK
That crossed my mind. (coughs)
I shot him down --

MAL
I seen.
I killed the ship... that killed us. Not... very Christian of me.

You did what's right.

Coming from you, that means... almost nothing... HNAAH! Ah, I'm long gone...

Doc'll bring you round. I look to be bored by many more sermons 'fore you slip -- don't move --

Can't... order me around, boy. I'm not one of your crew.

Yes you are.

Book coughs up blood, grabbing Mal. Urgent, almost angry.

You... it's on you now... all this death, this shit... you have to find a course. This can't mean nothing. River... you have to...

Come on, keep it up --

Book grabs Mal's face, talks as though replying to something:

I don't care what you believe! Just... believe it. Whatever you have to...

His breathing becomes laboured. Hitched.

Stopped. His hand slips away, his blood leaving a distinct print on Mal's face.

Jayne and Simon run up, Simon slowing down -- going to the Shepherd, but entirely aware he's dead. Zoe and Wash join them as Jayne looks around him, Mal still fixed on Book.
JAYNE
How come they ain't waiting? They know'd we was coming, how come they only sent one?

Zoe realizes the answer, turns to Wash.

ZOE
Get on the Cortex. Wave the Sanchez brothers, Li Shen -- anyone whose ever sheltered us after a heist. Tell them to get out. Get out now.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BRIDGE - LATER

Silence.

Every Cortex screen is on, each looking at a different place. Every one shows fire, destruction or the snow of an interrupted signal.

Mal stands alone amidst the screens, saying nothing. After a long moment, all of the screens hitch, the images replaced by identical images of the Operative. He looks solemn.

THE OPERATIVE
I'm sorry. But I cannot let you hide and I cannot let you run. Things become... extreme. And we wish for another way.

MAL
Don't talk at me like a righteous man. You are a killer of children.

THE OPERATIVE
When God wanted Pharaoh to release His people from bondage -- you know the story? He didn't ask. He sent his plagues down upon Egypt. That's me, Captain. The path to peace is paved with corpses. It's always been so.

MAL
So me and mine got to lie down and die so you can live in your better world?
THE OPERATIVE
I'm not going to live there. How could you think -- there's no place for me there, any more than there is for you. Malcolm, I'm a monster. What I do is evil, I've no illusions about it. But it must be done.

MAL
Why? Do you know why?

THE OPERATIVE
It's not my place to ask.

MAL
You will never see River Tam. I'm telling you this.

THE OPERATIVE
Maybe not. But you'll keep her close now, and when I blow Serenity out of the air, this will be ended. You're so terribly out of your depth, Captain. Your old boat can't take the pressure.

MAL
She ain't buckled yet. And the only reason you're talking such a lot is you can't get a fix on us.

THE OPERATIVE
Yes, your scrambler's code is too old for our seekers. You love that, yes? The small triumph over modernity. You really are the noble savage.

MAL
Nobody -- ever -- calls me noble.

THE OPERATIVE
But that's what's going to kill you, Malcolm. Nobility. It confuses your text, which is self-interest. And sin.

MAL
Only man I know who still believed in sin just died by your hand.

THE OPERATIVE
What do you believe in?
MAL
Not a solitary thing.

THE OPERATIVE
If that were true, you'd be
nothing more than a Reaver.

Something changes in Mal's expression.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
But then, maybe you're not that
far from --

Mal flicks a switch and every screen goes dark.

EXT. MINING CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Mal comes striding out, where the crew have been gathering
bodies, laying blankets over them.

MAL
Get these bodies together.

ZOE
We got time for gravedigging?

MAL
Zoe, you and Simon are gonna rope
'em together. Five or six of 'em.
I want them laid out on the nose
of our ship.

SIMON
Are you insane?

KAYLEE
What do you mean, the bodies...

MAL
Kaylee, I need you to muck the
reactor core, just enough to leave
a trail and make it read like
we're flying without containment,
not enough to fry us.

KAYLEE
These people are our friends --

MAL
Kaylee, you got a day's work to do
and two hours to do it.

(more)
MAL (cont'd)
(turns from her)
Jayne, you and Wash hoist up that
cannon mount. Goes right on top.
Piece or two of the other ship,
stick it on. Any place you can
tear hull without inner breach, do
that too.
(looking around)
And we're gonna need paint. We're
gonna need red paint.

INARA
(getting it)
<Oh merciful Buddha protect us...>

ZOE
Sir. Do you really mean to turn
our home into an abomination so we
can make a suicidal attempt at
passing through Reaver space?

MAL
I mean to live. I mean for us to
live. The Alliance won't have
that, so we go where they won't
follow.

JAYNE
God's balls, there's no way we're
going out there!

And everybody (save River) is talking at once:

SIMON
What's the point of living if you
sink to the level of a savage --

WASH
<There's nothing about this plan
that isn't horrific!>

INARA
Please, we should talk this over --

JAYNE
I ain't takin' orders from a man
has lost his brainstem --

And in the middle of it, Mal pulls his gun. Jayne, the most
in his face, steps back, hand on his.
MAL
This is how it works. Anybody
doesn't wanna fly with me anymore,
this is your port of harbour.
There's a lot of fine ways to die.
I'm not waiting for the Alliance
to choose mine.

He walks through the group, toward the smashed cockpit of the
Alliance fighter. Struggling to get out is the badly wounded
pilot. He sees Mal coming and raises his hands in surrender.

Mal shoots him in the head, turns back.

MAL
(continuing)
I mean to confound those killers,
and take my shot at getting to
Miranda, maybe finding out what
all I'm dying for. That's my
theme now. So I hear a word out
of any of you that ain't helping
me out or taking your leave I will
fucking shoot you.

He grabs a body -- drops it at Zoe's feet as he heads toward
the ship.

MAL
(continuing)
Get to work.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT
CLOSE ON THE BODIES as they BURN, flames passing over them
and suddenly flickering out as dark falls. They are patches
of leathered flesh stretched over bone -- monsters, screaming
soundlessly in the nothing of space.

We arm past them to the windows of the bridge, looking in at
Mal, watching, with Zoe behind and Wash at the helm.

And we pull back out to see the whole of Serenity for the
first time: It is hardly recognizable. Charred corpses on
the nose, Cannon atop with a space-suited corpse draped
within, long scars, welded-on parts and war paint... the
trail of green light burns out with sporadic bursts of vapor.

It looks, for all the world, like a Reaver ship.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING
Mal comes down the stairs to the catwalk. He hesitates, then
steps into the shuttle.
INT. SHUTTLE - CONTINUING

It's dark in here. Mal stands with his back to the door, no light on his face, shaking. Not crying, but overcome.

INARA
Mal.

He looks up: she's in the corner looking through that trunk of hers, hands on a long oilcloth wrapped around something.

MAL
Didn't see you.

INARA
I figured that.

MAL
Anything of use in there?

INARA
Maybe.

She puts it down and crosses to the bed. He sits by her.

MAL
You don't have to stay in the shuttle, you know. There's empty rooms, if you wanna sleep awhile.

INARA
You think anyone's set to sleep? Simon's portioning out overdoses of morphine, just in case.

MAL
Cheerful fellow.
(looking around)
Did you really miss this place?

INARA
(rueful smile)
Sometimes... Not so much right now.

A beat. He doesn't look at her when he asks:

MAL
Why did you leave?

She does look at him.

INARA
Why didn't you ask me not to?
Dissatisfied, Mal rises.

MAL
I, uh, I'd better go check on the crew. See how the inevitable mutiny is coming along.

They both want to say more. They don't. He goes.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT
Serenity flies, silent.

INT. FOREDECK HALL/BRIDGE - NIGHT
The group make their way toward the bridge. Those close enough to get a view out the window are looking freaked -- those already on the bridge are stock still. Pressed up against the glass of the window is River, just staring.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING
Reverse to see: an armada.

The black sky is filled with what must be ninety ships in a vague cluster, as Serenity breaks frame headed toward them. Most of them hang still in the air. Some move swimmingly about. Some turn in gentle drifts, as though looking around.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING
They all wait, tensed up, as they approach the armada...

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING
And arrive, moving slowly through the ranks of ships.

Serenity passes a large, bizarrely shaped ship. It turns, as though watching her. But lets her pass.

Another minute, and Serenity is through the Armada, headed for the small planet just beyond.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - LATER
The Operative stares blankly at the Ensign.

THE OPERATIVE
Define "disappeared".

The Ensign just looks uncomfortable.
INT. SERENITY: BRIDGE - LATER

Kaylee, Simon and River have left the bridge. The clouds fog the windows, so nothing below is visible.

ZOE
Every reading I'm getting says normal. Oceans, land masses... no tectonic instability or radiation.

WASH
Yeah, but no power, either.

MAL
Nothing at all?

WASH
Wait. Something. Might be a beacon, but it's awful weak.

MAL
Find it.

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

As she touches down, filling the frame. After a moment Mal, Zoe and Jayne emerge from the airlock in full suits, armed. Zoe reads a handheld scanner...

MAL
Gravity's Earthnorm.

ZOE
O2 levels check, pressure... if there's anything wrong the scanner isn't reading it.

Mal pulls off his helmet. Breathes, looking around him.

MAL
Well something sure as hell ain't right...

WIDER ANGLE: They're in a CITY. Gleaming metal, spread out for miles in every direction. Portions decimated by fires long since cold, others overgrown with weeds, but mostly intact. But silent, as if trapped in amber.

JAYNE
This ain't no little settlement.
ZOE
We flew over at least a dozen cities just as big. Why didn't we hear about this?

MAL
Beacon's up ahead.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Out of their suits now, Mal, Zoe and Jayne take point as the entire crew walks along the street, looking about them.

ZOE
Ho.

She moves rapidly, gun out, to:

ANGLE: A SKELETON

Face-down on the ground, clothes tattered. She examines it as Mal approaches, waving the others back.

ZOE
(continuing)
No entry wound, fractures...

MAL
Poison?

JAYNE (O.S.)
Got another one!

ANGLE: JAYNE is by a downed hovercraft. Inside are three skeletons: two grown-ups and a small child. Clothes in better condition, and again no sign of violence.

JAYNE
They's all just sittin'. Didn't crash...

ANGLE: RIVER is quietly becoming more and more upset.

CLOSE ON: KAYLEE walks in front of an office building, staying away from the cars as she hears:

JAYNE (O.S.)
Couple more here...

Kaylee takes another step -- and the corpse of a man is pressed up against the glass wall right behind her. Mouth open, skin dead blue, terribly skinny... a thing to haunt.
SIMON
(seeing it)
Kaylee... Come this way. Come
here. Don't --

But she looks --

KAYLEE

GAAAAaah God --

-- and steps back, horrified, as the others approach.

It's an office. About half the employees are there, in
chairs or on the ground, all in the same state as the first
fellow. We see ANGLES of the corpses as the gang evaluates...

JAYNE
How come they're preserved?

MAL
Place must've gone hermetic when
the power blew. Sealed 'em.

KAYLEE
(very upset)
What're they doing? What's
everybody doing?

SIMON
There's no discoloration, nobody's
doubled over or showing signs of
pain...

MAL
There's gasses that kill painless,
right?

INARA
But they didn't fall down. None
of them. They just lay down.

SIMON
More than anything, it looks like
starvation.

MAL
Anybody want to bet there's plenty
of food around?

INARA
They just lay down...

They notice River now, in the middle of the street, keening.
She drops to her knees, clutching her head.
As she speaks we see, as she sees, FLASHES: bodies. In homes, in piles: an entire world, gently dead.

RIVER
<Merciful God please take me away>, make them stop, they're everywhere, every city every house every room, they're all inside me, I can hear them all and they're saying nothing! GET UP! PLEASE, GET THEM UP! <I will close my ears and my heart and I will be a stone>, please God make me a stone...

JAYNE
(upset)
She's starting to damage my calm.

ZOE
Jayne --

JAYNE
She's right! Everybody's dead! This whole world is dead for no reason!

WASH
Let's get to the beacon.

EXT. LANDING STRIP - DAY

It's small -- landing is easier in cities with flying vehicles. At the end of a short runway, tipped and damaged, is an Alliance Research Vessel. The gang makes its way towards it.

INT. RESEARCH VESSEL - DAY

It's a mess, doors pried open, signs of violence but no bodies. The gang walks through it, looking around.

River pulls away from Simon, suddenly determined. She approaches a console, and a small cylindrical object. She turns it slightly --

A hologram squawks to life amidst them all. First we see images that resemble the flashes from River's mind: Corpses, everywhere. We hear and then see DOCTOR CARON standing exactly where she was when she recorded this message...

(As she speaks, we see angles of everyone watching, taking it in... River silently mouths every word.)
CARON
-- just a few of the images we've recorded, and you can see it isn't... it isn't what we thought. There's been no war here, and no terraforming event. The environment is stable. It's the Pax, the G-32 Paxilon Hydrochlorate that we added to the air processors. It's...

(tearing up)
...well it works... it was supposed to calm the population, weed out aggression. Make a peaceful... it worked. The people here stopped fighting. And then they stopped everything else. They stopped going to work, stopped breeding... talking... eating...

(trying for control)
There's thirty million people here and they all just let themselves die. They didn't even kill themselves. They just... most starved. When they stopped working the power grids, there were overloads, fires -- people burned to death sitting in their chairs. Just sitting.

There is a loud bang somewhere behind her -- she starts, gathers herself.

CARON
(continuing)
I have to be quick. There was no one working the receptors when we landed, so we hit pretty hard. We can't leave. We can't take any of the local transports because...

The bang again.

CARON
(continuing)
There are people... they're not people... about a tenth of a percent of the population had the opposite reaction to the Pax. Their aggressor response increased... beyond madness. They've become...

(more)
CARON (cont'd)
they've killed most of us... not
just killed, they've done... things.

WASH
(quietly)
Reavers... they made them...

CARON
I won't live to report this, and
we haven't got power to... people
have to know...
(loses it here)
... We meant it for the best... to
make people safer... to... God!

She whirls, grabs a gun and fires -- then aims the gun at her
own head - but a Reaver is on her, knocks the gun away and
bites her face --

She screams continuously as the Reaver tops her, biting at
her and tearing at her clothes, at her skin.

JAYNE
(quietly)
Turn it off.

Wash does, nobody saying anything.

Mal walks outside.

EXT. RESEARCH VESSEL - CONTINUING

He takes a few unsteady steps away from the vessel. Inara
appears behind him, follows -- he holds a hand out behind
him, seemingly to make her stop, but then he grabs her
shoulder, holds her for support. She puts her hand over his.

MAL
I seen so much death... I been on
fields carpeted with bodies,
friends and enemies -- I seen men
and women blown to messes no
further from me than you.

INARA
Mal...

MAL
But every single one of those
people died on their feet.
Fighting.

(more)
MAL (cont'd)
Or, hell, running away -- doing
summat to get through. This is...

INARA
Mal, I need your help with this.
I need you to help me, because I
can't --

He looks at her, folds her into his arms. Brings her face to
his, not kissing but **touching**, pressing into each other with
the urgency of pulsing, necessary life.

INT. RESEARCH VESSEL - CONTINUING

River falls to her knees, vomiting. Simon goes to her, puts
his hand on her back, lets her ride it out.

SIMON
River...

RIVER
I'm all right.

She looks at him, wet eyes full of clarity.

RIVER
(continuing)
I'm all right.

Wash pulls the recording cylinder out of the console.

INT. SERENITY - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The cylinder is on the table. Mal stands at the head,
looking at his crew.

MAL
This report is maybe twelve years
old. Parliament buried it, and it
stayed buried til River dug it up.
This is what they feared she knew.
And they were right to fear,
'cause there's a universe of folk
that are gonna know it too.

(touches the cylinder)
They're gonna **see** it. Somebody
has to speak for these people.

He pauses. Everyone waits.
MAL
(continuing)
You all got on this boat for different reasons, but you all come to the same place. So now I'm asking more of you than I have before. Maybe all. 'Cause as sure as I know anything I know this: They will try again. Maybe on another world, maybe on this very ground, swept clean. A year from now, ten, they'll swing back to the belief that they can make people... better. And I do not hold to that. So no more running. I aim to misbehave.

There is a beat as he eyes them all.

JAYNE
My grandma always told me: if you can't do something smart, do something right.

By way of emphasis he loudly cocks his big-ass rifle. Mal takes in the fact that Jayne has spoken for them all.

MAL
That the same grandma told you there was an evil dwarf spirit living in your well?

JAYNE
(nodding)
She was a fun grandma.

SIMON
Do we have a plan?

MAL
Mr Universe. We haven't the equipment to broadwave this code, but he can put it on every screen for thirty worlds. He's pretty damn close, too.

RIVER
Based on our orbital trajectories, he reached optimum proximity just before our sunset. If we make a direct run within the hour we're only 67,332 miles out. At full burn we'd reach him inside of three hours.
She doesn't notice the reactions to her sudden clarity -- she's still somewhat in her own world.

WASH
Still got the Reavers, and probably the Alliance between us and him.

ZOE
It's a fair bet the Alliance knows about Mr Universe. They're gonna see this coming.

MAL
No.

He takes a long moment, his jaw tightening imperceptibly.

MAL
(continuing)
They're not gonna see this coming.

CLOSE ON: One of Serenity's jet engines, as it FIRES up.

EXT. CITY - AFTERNOON
Serenity is taking off, leaving the dead place behind.

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING
He's talking with Mal and Wash again, very animated.

MR UNIVERSE
It's no problem! Bring it on bring it on bring it on! From here to the eyes and ears of the 'verse, that's my motto, or it might be if I start having a motto.

MAL (ON SCREEN)
We won't be long.

MR UNIVERSE
You're gonna get caught in the ion cloud, it'll play merry hob with your radar, but pretty pretty lights and a few miles after you'll be right in my orbit.

MAL (ON SCREEN)
You'll let us know if anyone else comes at you?
DROP BACK WIDE to see: The Operative and ten soldiers are in the room, visible to Mr Universe but not to the screen.

MR UNIVERSE
You'll be the first.

CLOSE ON: the Operative's sword, as he unsheathes it.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

We are amongst the Reaver armada. Serenity slices quietly through the ships, as we come around and see Miranda receding in the distance.

Serenity drifts through the armada -- and suddenly another ship fires up, running next to her...

The two ships pace each other, another vessel coming about as though staring at Serenity, who comes closer and closer to frame, till we see the suited corpse draped on the cannon.

It suddenly moves: it's Mal.

He swings the cannon round and fires at the ship pacing them. It BLOWS, fragmenting into burning bits that spiral into other ships, causing two smaller ones to blow as well.

Mal swings around and fires at another ship.

EXT. SATELLITE - NIGHT

In close orbit waits the Alliance force, at least fifty strong, and clearly with high tech firepower. We move in on the Operative's ship, in the middle of the cluster.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

As the Operative waits with the others.

HELMSMAN
I'm reading activity in the cloud.

THE OPERATIVE
(into com)
Lock and fire on my command.
(to himself)
You should have let me see her.
We should have done this as men.
Not with fire...

HELMSMAN
Sir!
EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

It's the Operative's POV: the swirling Ion cloud as Serenity breaks through and heads at us, fully Reavered out.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

He looks confused, then smiles at the ruse. Hits the com:

THE OPERATIVE
Vessel in range, lock on...
(admiringly)
Bastard's not even changing course...

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

As Serenity get a bit closer, FIFTY REAVER SHIPS suddenly burst from the cloud, also heading straight at us.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - BRIDGE - CONTINUING

The Operative -- and everyone around him - goes big-eyed.

THE OPERATIVE
That's not good...

HELMSMAN
(freaking)
Sir?

THE OPERATIVE
Target the Reavers!
(into com)
Target everyone! Somebody FIRE!

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity suddenly lists hard to port -- until she's almost upside down -- the Alliance ships FIRE, missing Serenity but tagging a few Reaver ships, none of whom have slowed down --

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal is back on the bridge as we look out at the upside down Alliance fleet, missiles just passing us --

MAL
We're too close for them to arm --

ZOE
This is gonna be very tight --
JAYNE
(entering)
Hey look, we're upside down.

Zoe and Mal shoot a look at Jayne.

WASH
(to himself)
I am a leaf on the wind, watch how
I soar.

EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity slips right under the Operative's ship and ducks and
weaves between dozens more. The Reaver force hits the
Alliance head on -- and several ships do just that, smashing
into bigger ships kamikaze-style, everything exploding --

The fleet mobilizes, blasting Reaver ships, circling around,
and an air war begins, a frenzied, balletic ecstasy of
destruction that the camera hurtles through as ships and
parts of ships fly at and past it.

ANGLE: SERENITY

She nearly makes it all the way through the alliance fleet
before a barrelling chunk of debris -- which is twice their
size -- forces them to come hard about and remain in the fray.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal looks out at the chaos...

MAL
Chickens come home to roost...

They are suddenly JOLTED by a glancing blow from another
ship -- Wash struggles to control her --

MAL
(continuing)
The hell --

WASH
(panicky)
It's okay! I am a leaf on the
wind!

MAL
(also panicky)
What does that mean?
EXT. SPACE - CONTINUING

Serenity makes her way past the carnage and heads down toward the tiny satellite moon.

INT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

As the vessel shakes, clearly breached, The Operative moves to a door marked: DART. He puts his thumb to a panel and the door slides up to reveal a standing, almost formfitting one-man cockpit.

EXT. THE OPERATIVE'S SHIP - CONTINUING

The Dart disengages and bullets down towards the surface. As it moves from the Operative's ship, we see that a Reaver vessel has smashed into the main viewshield, and the ship is spinning, explosions popping silently all over it.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

She continues down, the metallic expanse of Mr Universe's little moon complex sprawling below them. A moment after Serenity blows through frame, so does a Reaver ship.

It fires an electronic pulse at Serenity and sparks fly.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

WASH
We're fried! I got no control!

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUING

Sparks -- and arcs of electricity -- are everywhere here. Kaylee jumps back as she is electrocuted -- Simon runs in and pulls her out, slams the door shut on the erupting fires.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

MAL
Where's the back up? Where's the back up?

He and Wash are frantically flipping buttons -- the ship whirs to a semblance of life --

ZOE
Back up reads at 20%...
(toto Wash)
Can you get us down?

WASH
I'm gonna have to glide her in!
ZOE
Will that work?

WASH
Long as that landing strip is made
of fluffy pillows...

MAL
(on the com)
Everybody to the upper decks!
Strap yourselves to something!

EXT. LANDING STRIP - CONTINUING

We can see it, a long strip, which halfway along becomes a
kind of hanger. Serenity arcs at it uncomfortably fast.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Wash is fighting the stick with extreme concentration as Zoe
pulls out a seat as well, straps in.

INT. AFT HALL - CONTINUING

Jayne, Simon and Inara pull harnesses not unlike "Batman the
Ride" seats from the ceiling, help the others in.

EXT./INT. LANDING STRIP/HANGER - CONTINUING

And Serenity HITS the ground -- the landing gear folds and
snaps under the weight -- the ship keeps going, now inside
the hanger, heading towards the entrance to the facility,
slowing, fishtailing and coming about a full one eighty -- it
goes beyond the strip and crashes down into the pedestrian
area, so that the nose is sticking back out at the runway but
the body of the ship is hidden from it.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

There is a moment of quiet.

WASH
I am a leaf on the wind. Watch --

A massive harpoon CRASHES through the windshield and impales
him to his chair. It's as thick around as a telephone pole.

Wash has time to open his mouth in surprise before he is dead.

ZOE

WASH!

She moves to him --
(continuing)
Wash baby baby no, come on, you gotta move you gotta move baby please --

Mal rips her away and to the floor as another projectile slams through the window into the wall above them.

EXT. LANDING STRIP - CONTINUING

We see the ship that has fired the harpoons as Reavers start out of it. A second Reaver vessel enters frame from above, about to land next to it.

EXT. SERENITY - MOMENTS LATER

The cargo bay door opens -- just the little door housed inside the ramp -- and Jayne comes out with his biggest gun. He looks up, toward the edge of the runway, but no Reavers have arrived yet.

JAYNE
Go!

The entire crew piles out, all heavily bedecked with weapons.

MAL
Head inside!

INT. BLACK ROOM/INNER HALL - MOMENTS LATER

A small double-sized doorway leads to the "Black Room", which is the entrance proper to the facility.

Mal hits a button and huge, thick, blast doors open from the sides AND the top and bottom, creating the effect of a square hole getting bigger. The hall itself is smaller than the black room, but still has the arrows on the ceiling, that point to an elevator some fifty feet away.

MAL
Come on. Jayne, rearguard.

Zoe slows, looking around her.

ZOE
Sir.

(he turns to her)
This is a good hold point.

MAL
We all stay together --
ZOE
No. They have to come through here; they'll bottleneck and we can thin 'em out. We get pushed back there's the blast doors.

KAYLEE
I can rig 'em so they won't re-open once they close.

MAL
Then shut 'em and hide til --

ZOE
We need to draw them til it's done. This is the place. We'll buy you the time.

JAYNE
(to the others)
Move those crates back there for cover -- and make sure they ain't filled with anything goes boom.

KAYLEE
Wait, Wash -- where's Wash?

Nobody (but River) realized he wasn't there. Zoe is dead calm.

ZOE
He ain't comin'.

Everybody takes that in, Kaylee's eyes welling up.

JAYNE
Move the gorram crates! Come on!

We hear savage SCREAMS from the hanger -- they're approaching. Mal moves to the door, Jayne beside him.

ANGLE: HIS POV

Reavers rush toward them.

He turns to Jayne.

MAL
Tell me you brought 'em this time...

Jayne smiles grimly, tosses Mal a grenade as he pops his own and fastballs it at the Reavers.
It explodes in their midst, smoke and man-parts flying about. Mal rolls his a shorter distance, then slams the door shut.

ANGLE: THE GRENADE

Explodes, raining a bunch of equipment -- and part of a catwalk -- right in front of the door.

In the black room, the door nearly buckles from the explosion. Everyone takes positions behind the crates. Zoe stands calmly, her back to the door, loading her sawed-off.

MAL
(continuing; moving back to Zoe)
Zoe... are you here?

She looks up at him.

ZOE
Do the job, sir.

MAL
You hold. Hold till I'm back.

He takes off -- passes Inara, the two of them holding a look for as long as they can. Then he's in the elevator and gone.

Jayne moves over to Zoe.

JAYNE
Captain's right. Can't be thinking on revenge if we're gonna get through this.

ZOE
You really think any of us are gonna get through this?

He looks back at their army: A companion, a doctor, a mechanic and a more-than-usually out of it River. A beat, and he looks back at Zoe with forlorn hope:

JAYNE
I might...

INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator stops and Mal makes his way to the island of screens and machines in the center of the space.

The first thing he takes in is that every broadwave port has been destroyed. The second:
ANGLE: MR UNIVERSE is lying dead, eyes open, half draped on his equally still lovebot. A trail of blood shows he crawled from his chair.

Mal comes close. Nothing. He starts to move away again and the lovebot turns her head, her eyes focusing with an audible whir. She speaks with surprisingly realistic expressiveness, and a warped, computery version of Mr Universe's voice.

LOVEBOT
Mal.

Mal stops.

LOVEBOT
(continuing)
Guy killed me, Mal. He killed me with a sword. How weird is that? I got... a short span here... they destroyed my equipment but I have a back-up unit... bottom of the complex, right over the generator. Hard to get to. I know they missed it. They can't stop the signal, Mal. They can never stop the signal.

(beat)
Okay this is painful. On many levels. I'm not --

She turns back, powering down. Recording over.

A beat, and Mal takes off.

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

Inara is on her knees, unwrapping the oilcloth we saw in her shuttle. River is in the corner, clutching her head.

RIVER
I can't shut them up...

SIMON
It's okay...

RIVER
They're all made up of rage. I can't...

A BANG as a body slams against the door.

SIMON
Just stay low. I'm right here.
Jayne moves past them to Zoe, takes position by her.

   JAYNE
   She picked a sweet bung of a time
to go helpless on us.

   ZOE
   (calls out)
   Jayne and I take the first wave.
   Nobody shoots less they get past
   our fire.

Simon moves to Kaylee, who is shaky as hell. The bangs on
the door continue.

   KAYLEE
   Oh, I didn't plan on going out
like this. I think we did right,
but...

   SIMON
   I never planned... anything. I
just wanted to keep River safe.
Spent so much time on Serenity
trying to find us a home I never
realized I already had.

She looks at him with soft surprise.

   SIMON
   (continuing)
   My one true regret in all this is
never being with you.

   KAYLEE
   With me? You mean to say, as, sex?

   SIMON
   (smiles)
   I mean to say.

Kaylee snaps her cartridge home with way more precision than
we might expect from her, takes steady aim at the door.

   KAYLEE
   Hell with this. I'm gonna live.

Simon looks at her a moment, then turns his attention to the
door.

Inara come up into frame with the contents of the oilcloth:
a bow and arrow, which she pulls back with focused grace.

ANGLE: THE DOOR starts to come off its hinges.
INT. MR UNIVERSE'S HQ - CONTINUING

A panel is kicked in from the ceiling and the Operative drops down, having clearly entered from a different location.

He looks around, carrying a laser-pistol. He moves past Mr Universe and Lenore --

LOVEBOT
Mal.
(The Operative turns)
Guy killed me, Mal.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal has reached it and surveys the situation.

Before him is a railing, and he can look down on the generator shaft. It's miles deep, with machines rotating and grinding, and arcs of electricity ricocheting around it.

On the other side is a platform, with the broadwave console sitting behind a clear plastic partition. Cables and chains run along the ceiling, around a series of ladder rungs.

MAL
Hard to get to. That's a fact.

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

The door is pried partially open -- enough for one Reaver to squeeze through and charge.

Zoe stands up and shoots him in the head. He arcs back hard as the second comes, Zoe shoots him, calmly walking toward the door --

JAYNE
Zoe... Gorramnit...

But she is in a trance, and we see beneath the calm, to the bubbling magma of rage that keeps her firing, single shots, each one a kill, till five men down and she's out of ammo.

The sixth comes at her swinging a blade and she blocks, the precision of military training still in her as she flips him, wrestling the blade free and swinging it down out of frame, bringing it up bloody, swinging again as the door bursts open and she's rushed from behind --

But Jayne totes an automatic, sprays killing fire on the lot, moving forward himself --
JAYNE
(continuing)
ZOE! Get yer ass back in the line!

She looks up, almost confused -- and one of Jayne's targets comes back off the ground and slices at her back with a blade, she screams as he cuts deep -- and an arrow lodges in his neck.

Inara pulls up a fresh arrow, shaking only slightly.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - LATER

Mal is on the railing, reaching for the 'rungs' on the ceiling just above him. He can almost get them -- one wrong move and he pitches into the jaws of death...

A laser shot nails him in the lower back -- he arches, legs sliding off the rail -- he falls and hits the rail with the backs of his legs, flipping painfully onto his face as he falls, mercifully, back onto the platform.

The Operative comes around some equipment for a closer shot as Mal gets shakily up.

MAL
(in pain)
Shot me in the back. I haven't...
made you angry, have I?

THE OPERATIVE
There's a lot of innocent people in the air being killed right now.

MAL
You have no idea how true that is.

There's no wise-ass attitude in him now. They stand, facing off at ten paces.

MAL
(continuing)
I know the secret now. The truth that burned up River Tam's brain and set you after her. And the rest of the 'verse is gonna know it too. 'Cause they need to.

THE OPERATIVE
You really believe that?

MAL
I do.
THE OPERATIVE
You willing to die for that belief?

MAL
I am.

The Operative raises his gun -- but Mal is the quickdraw master, shoots the gun out of the Operative's hand and gets two hits to the chest (armored) before he makes it to cover.

MAL
(continuing)
Of course, that ain't exactly plan A...

He drops out his cartridge and slams another in.

The Operative hides behind some machinery. Tries to peek out at Mal -- and more shots send him scrambling back to cover.

Mal holsters his gun and jumps for the rung above him, starts going hand over hand to the island, moving as fast as he can.

The Operative sees his moment, dives for his gun -- but it's been ruined by Mal's shot. He looks over at Mal with death in his eyes. He runs at the railing, vaults off it, and grabs a chain -- it snaps and he swings, grabbing another.

He reaches Mal and double kicks him from behind -- Mal flies off the rung but grabs a chain -- he tries to kick at the Operative, but the guy is frikkin' Tarzan, he climbs up and pulls a lever releasing one end of Mal's chain -- Mal goes swinging, smacks into the wall six feet below the platform.

He scrambles up just as the Operative swings himself toward the platform from above.

INT. BLACK ROOM/INNER CORRIDOR - CONTINUING

Jayne is still firing continuously as he drags Zoe back to the barricades. Simon moves to help -- Kaylee firing now, squinting with effort -- and pulls open the cut back of Zoe's shirt, checks the wound.

SIMON
Spine's intact --

ZOE
Just gimme a bandage.

Simon pulls a spraycan from his bag, sprays the wound with a foam that hardens instantly into an elastic covering.
There are a few gun shots (as well as nail-balls and blades) from the Reavers. Jayne switches weapons, tossing another to Zoe and opening fire --

**JAYNE**
Oh, now you're likin' guns, huh?
Cheaters!

He takes a hit in the shoulder, grimaces and keeps firing.

River watches, the gun limp in her hand. Kaylee grabs it and starts another round -- but she's peppered with dart-like projectiles. She screams and drops the weapon, pulling the projectiles from her -- Inara helps her up, pulls her back as Zoe shouts:

**ZOE**
Everybody fall back! Fall back!

Everyone stumbles or is dragged into the inner corridor. Inara hits the controls and the doors start to close, from each side and above and below. Then, when the hole is maybe four by four, they stop.

**ZOE**
(continuing)
Jayne! Grenade!

**JAYNE**
Very last one...

He tosses it through the hole. Zoe doesn't even flinch from the blast as she thinks.

**ZOE**
They're gonna get in --

**KAYLEE**
Can close it... from outside...

**ZOE**
No one's coming back from that...

She tries to stand, fails.

**ZOE**
(continuing)
How much ammo do we have?

**JAYNE**
We got three full cartridges and my swingin' cod. That's all.

Inara is by the elevator, pounding for it to come.
INARA
Lift isn't moving...

ZOE
When they come, try to plug the hole with 'em...

Kaylee cries out and Simon moves to her.

KAYLEE
I'm starting to lose some feeling here... I think there's something in them darts they threwed at me.

SIMON
Lie still. I'm gonna give you something to counteract the --

He stands, looking around him. His bag is over by Zoe.

SIMON
(continuing)
My bag.

and SHKOWW!, the bullet takes him in the belly -- everything suddenly moving very slowly as he spins slightly, one foot lifted, a confused expression on his face -- then speeding right back up as he slams down on his back, gasping for air.

River's mouth opens in a scream she doesn't make.

Blood spreads from Simon's belly. Inara rushes to him, grabs cloth and puts pressure on the wound, puts Simon's hand on it.

INARA
Keep pressure here...

SIMON
My bag. Need... adrenaline... and a shot of calaphar for Kaylee... I can't... River...?

She is by his side, takes his hand. She has a kind of serenity to her, like she understands something now.

SIMON
(continuing)
River... I'm sorry...

RIVER
No. No.

The lights go out. Everyone looks about them. Jayne fires again, but all the sound has bled out save these two.
SIMON
I hate to... leave...

RIVER
You won't. You take care of me,
Simon. You've always taken care
of me.

She stands as the emergency lights come on, giving her face
an unearthly glow as she looks down at him.

RIVER
(continuing)
My turn.

She's running so fast, nobody has time to react til she DIVES
through the hole in the doors, then Simon SCREAMS her name,
the scream following us back into the Black Room where River
lands in a perfect roll, comes up in a room full of Reavers.

Without a moment's hesitation she makes it to the panel, gets
the doors closing. She dodges a blade, but a blow to the
back of the head shakes her. She weaves around a couple of
Reavers to get to the closing doors, but at the last second
her ankle is grabbed and pulled out from under her.

The last thing we see is her being dragged back as they swarm
over her.

ANGLE: THE BLAST DOORS, as they shut with a shuddering KLUNG.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal gets up the chain to the platform. The Operative is on
Mal before he gets his footing, tackles him as Mal's gun goes
skittering over the edge into oblivion. There is a railing
here or Mal would go over as well -- but he comes back with
a couple of hammer blows, gets the Operative off him.

They square off, Mal stumbling back into a tool chest,
knocking over tools and computer parts.

The Operative reaches behind him and pulls his sword
gracefully from the holster under his jacket.

Mal produces his weapon: a tiny screwdriver.

He hurls a toolbox at the Operative and rushes him, gets
inside sword range and tries for the neck with the
screwdriver -- the Operative blocks it and works the sword
point against the edge of Mal's stomach. Starts pushing
slowly, despite Mal's resistance, and breaks skin.
Mal looks at the Operative a moment -- and the sword slides all the way through Mal's belly. Mal's eyes go wide.

THE OPERATIVE
You know what your sin is, Malcolm?

MAL
(shaky smile)
Aw hell, I'm a fan of all seven.

He headbutts the Operative viciously, then punches him so hard he staggers back, losing his grip on the sword. The Operative responds with a spin kick -- Mal holds up the screwdriver and the Operative swings his foot right into it, gasping as Mal pulls the screwdriver -- and leg it's stuck in -- back as he rockets his fist into the Operative's chin.

The Operative goes down hard, dazed, as Mal grabs the sword still in his belly.

MAL
(continuing)
But right now...

He pulls the sword out, grimacing. Holds it over the Operative. The smile gone.

MAL
(continuing)
I'm gonna have to go with Wrath.

He stabs down at his foe's face -- but the Operative rolls out of the way, kicks Mal from the ground and is up in a second, grabbing Mal's sword hand -- the sword drops -- and punching him repeatedly in his stomach wound.

INT. INNER HALL - CONTINUING

The gang is subdued -- because they are all of them injured and Simon is slipping away. Jayne looks at Zoe.

JAYNE
You suppose he got through? Think Mal got the word out?

ZOE
(almost convincingly)
He got through. I know he got through.
INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

Mal goes down hard, spitting up blood. He sees the sword, moves -- but the Operative kicks him in the face. Picks him up, Mal too tired to throw a decent punch.

THE OPERATIVE

I'm sorry.

The Operative spins him and **DIGS** his bunched fingers right into the same nerve cluster that he paralyzed Doctor Mathias with. Mal goes rigid, his face a rictus of pain.

The Operative goes near the railing and retrieves his sword. Mal trembles, trying to move -- but nothing happens.

THE OPERATIVE

(continuing)
You should know there's no shame in this. You've done remarkable things. But you're fighting a war you've already lost.

He lunges -- and Mal twists gracefully out of the way, grabbing the Operative's swordhand and pulling it forward -- while driving his elbow into the Operative's neck with staggering force.

MAL
Well, I'm known for that.

The Operative drops the blade, mouth open, stumbling back, unable to make a sound.

Mal spins him, grabbing both his arms and working his own through them in a twisted full nelson -- then bringing his arms up suddenly, the Operative's mouth going wider as we hear his arms **crack**.

Mal drops him sitting against the railing, picks up his sword, saying:

MAL

(continuing)
Piece a shrapnel tore up that nerve cluster my first tour. Had it moved.

He squats down, looks the Operative in the face.
MAL
(continuing)
Sorry 'bout the throat. Expect you'd wanna say your famous last words now. Just one trouble.

He reaches over the railing, pulls the back of the Operative's jacket through and shoves the sword through the fabric, pinning the Operative in his sitting position.

MAL
(continuing)
I ain't gonna kill you.

He moves to the console, starts prepping it.

MAL
(continuing)
Hell, I'm gonna grant your greatest wish.

He inserts the cylinder, turns it slightly. It hums to life.

MAL
(continuing)
I'm gonna show you a world without sin.

He hits "send all". The cylinder lights up and the broadcast begins. Here it is projected as a two-dimensional image on the clear plastic partition, right in front of the Operative.

There are images first of the city -- of bodies, on the street, in homes and offices.... image after image, just as we saw on the research vessel -- and in River's mind.

CARON (V.O.)
These are some of the first sites we scouted on Miranda. There is no one living on this planet.
There is no one...

Mal hits the controls and a ramp extends towards the other side. He begins to cross. Never even looks back.

On the Operative, trapped, watching in growing horror...

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

CLOSE ON: A Reaver in EXTREME SLOW MOTION. Face full of fury, he is swinging his blade in a frenzy of hate.

And a small hand smashes that face so hard that teeth fly -- the Reaver clearing frame to reveal:
River.

She is bloodied, but not killed. She's as she was in the bar -- moving faster and more efficiently than anyone can, ducking and weaving and gutting and kicking and there are piles of Reavers already, she never breaks concentration as she uses their own blades against them, throws them, does everything in her power to stay one step ahead of -- or above -- the mob.

She slams backwards into a wall opposite the blast doors -- and a grappling hook punches through it, just missing her.

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

The Operative watches the end of the broadcast. We are on his face through the clear plastic, so the images projected on it blur right before him: the Reaver, Dr. Caron -- and her screaming doesn't stop til something is shoved in her mouth.

INT. INNER HALL - CONTINUING

The gang is still trying to patch themselves together when the elevator doors open. Mal staggers out, holding his bleeding side.

ZOEL
Sir?

MAL
It's done. Report?

Zoe looks at the badly wounded Simon, is about to give a report -- and the doors start to open behind her.

Everyone turns to look, those who can feebly raising weapons, as the square iris of the opening blast doors widens to reveal River, standing alone. She is holding two Reaver blades, is bloody but unbowed. And the only one alive.

We hold on her a moment, then the wall behind her is ripped completely away.

Behind it, grappling hooks chained to a huge tractor pull the wall away as through the smoke come some fifteen Alliance soldiers, who line up, rifles trained on our gang...

SOLDIER
Drop your weapons! Drop 'em now!

ANOTHER SOLDIER
Do we engage? Do we engage?
Mal and the others tense up. River turns slowly to face the soldiers, blades still gripped... A soldier levels his gun at her, sweaty and frantic... others still shouting...

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR - CONTINUING

The Operative sits in silence, the voices coming over his com:

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Targets are acquired! Do we have a kill order? Do we have an order?

INT. BLACK ROOM - CONTINUING

CLOSE ON: THE SOLDIER'S FINGER, SQUEEZING THE TRIGGER...

BLACK OUT.

EXT. DESERT PLANET - SUNSET

We are close on a gravestone. It is rounded, looks more like a bell than a headstone. It is topped by a jar built into the stone. The jar is weathered tin at top and bottom, but glass in the middle. Inside the glass we can see one of those slightly moving photos. It is of Mr Universe and his lovebot, and the name Mr Universe is carved roughly in the stone beneath.

The camera moves to the right and we see another such stone, this one bearing the image and inscription: Shepherd Derrial Book.

The third is Hoban Washburne. Wash.

The camera continues moving right, but the next stone houses a small home-made rocket with pieces of paper taped to it instead of a picture-jar. And fixing another slip of paper to it is River.

She moves away from the stone as Mal does likewise. They're flanked by the crew: Jayne, Inara (to whom Mal moves), Simon, who stands holding River before him and hand in hand with Kaylee. He has a crutch supporting his other side.

There is a moment, then they all move aside, saying nothing. Between them walks Zoe, in a simple white funeral gown, holding a burning taper.

She stands at the stones a moment, then holds the taper to the rocket fuse. Stands back with the others.

The rocket shoots up into the darkening sky. They all watch its sputtering tail a moment, then it it explodes in a series of fireworks.
WIDE ON the group, as the fireworks go off over their heads.

We are close on another explosion when it becomes:

CLOSE ON: A BLOWTORCH spitting sparks. Widen to see:

EXT. REPAIR YARD/SERENITY - DAY

Zoe is harnessed to the nose of the ship, welding on a replacement for the very window the harpoon that impaled Wash came through.

INT. DUCT INSIDE SERENITY - DAY

We are close on River as she works inside a crawlspace just above the engine room, replacing wires. Some of them run to a computer screen that she checks and adjusts.

EXT. REPAIR YARD/TOP OF SERENITY - DAY

Mal and Jayne hold onto the cannon as a crane is lifting it off the top of the ship.

Close on Mal as he watches it go...

WIDER ANGLE:

EXT. REPAIR YARD - CONTINUING

And here we see the whole ship for the first time, harnessed by the wings above the ground so she can be worked on all over. The cannon is being hoisted away from her as a crew of repairmen wheel new landing gear under her belly.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - DAY

Kaylee, deeply greasy, tweaks a part on the engine and crosses to the back where Simon, shirtless and not entirely ungreasy himself, is wrenching a bolt into place above his head. A moment looking at him and she can't help herself -- she slides her arms around his chest...

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

On a scaffold, Inara repaints the name on the nose with elegant precision.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - DAY

Kaylee and Simon are just making out like fiends, work completely forgotten. With nothing resembling elegant precision, they sink out of frame to the floor.
A beat, and River's head appears from the crawlspace above, looking down at them with detached curiosity.

EXT. REPAIR YARD/SERENITY - DAY

It's raining as Mal is hauling in the last of the repair equipment. The camera moves around him, skirting the ground of the junkyard, till it lands on a figure in foreground, standing watching him from some twenty feet away.

Mal stops, doesn't turn. Hand near his gun.

MAL

If you're here to tell me we ain't finished... then we will be real quick.

The Operative stands just under the canopy of the nose of the ship, framed by the rain behind.

THE OPERATIVE

Do you know what an uproar you've caused? Protests, riots -- cries for a recall of the entire Parliament.

MAL

(turning)

We've seen the broadwaves.

THE OPERATIVE

You must be pleased.

MAL

'Verse wakes up a spell. Won't be long 'fore she rolls right over and falls back asleep. T'aint my worry.

THE OPERATIVE

I can't guarantee they won't come after you. The Parliament. They have a hundred men like me and they are not forgiving.

MAL

That don't bode especially well for you... giving the order to let us go, patching up our hurt...

THE OPERATIVE

I told them the Tams were no longer a threat -- damage done.

(more)
THE OPERATIVE (cont'd)
They might listen, but... I think they know I'm no longer their man.

MAL
They take you down, I don't expect to grieve overmuch. Like to kill you myself, I see you again.

THE OPERATIVE
You won't. There is...
(small, grim smile)
...nothing left to see.

Mal looks at him a moment, then picks up his gear to head inside. The Operative starts away into the rain, then stops to look up at the nose of the ship.

ANGLE: the newly painted Serenity, standing tall in the rain.

THE OPERATIVE
(continuing)
"Serenity". You lost everything in that battle. Everything you had, everything you were... how did you go on?

Mal hits the button to close the inner doors, steps inside as they slide together. Glances at the Operative, unimpressed.

MAL
You still standing there when the engine starts, you never will figure it out.

The Operative watches the door shut. A moment, and he goes.

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUING

Mal stows the gear as Zoe approaches.

MAL
(to himself)
What a whiner...

ZOE
Sir, we have a green light. Inspection's pos and we're clear for upthrust.

MAL
Think she'll hold together?
ZOE
She's tore up plenty. But she'll fly true.

A beat between them before:

MAL
Make sure everything's secure.
Could be bumpy.

ZOE
Always is.

She takes off and Mal heads up the stairs.

INT. FOREDECK HALL - CONTINUING

Mal comes in and runs into Inara. Jayne passes through as they talk, heading down into his bunk. Pays them no mind. Neither do Simon and Kaylee, in the dining room stowing supplies.

MAL
We're taking her out. Should be about a day's ride to get you back to your girls.

INARA
Right.

MAL
(moving past her)
You ready to get off this heap and back to a civilized life?

INARA
I, uh...
(he stops)
I don't know.

He looks at her, a smile in his eyes.

MAL
Good answer.

He turns and heads into the bridge.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal eases himself into his seat. Takes a moment to adjust one of Wash's dashboard dinosaurs, then looks to his left.
MAL
You gonna ride shotgun, help me fly?

River is in the copilot's seat, looking intently at the screens and buttons.

RIVER
That's the plan.

MAL
Think you can work out how to get her in the --

She is flipping switches without even looking, as the ship hums to life.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING

Her engines fire up and tilt. She lifts gently off the ground.

INT. BRIDGE - CONTINUING

Mal looks slightly, only slightly nonplussed.

MAL
Okay, clearly some aptitude for the... but it ain't all buttons and charts, <little albatross>. You know what the first rule of flying is? Well, I suppose you do, since you already know what I'm about to say.

RIVER
I do. But I like to hear you say it.

He looks out at the rain on his windows, at his screens, taking her up as he says:

MAL
Love. You can learn all the math in the 'verse, but you take a boat in the air you don't love, she'll shake you off just as sure as the turning of worlds. Love keeps her in the air when she oughta fall down, tells you she's hurting 'fore she keens. Makes her a home.

River also looks out at the sky.
RIVER
Storm's getting worse.

MAL
We'll pass through it soon enough.

EXT. SERENITY - CONTINUING
As we shoot up with her through sheeting rain, towards the top of the sky.

EXT. SPACE - MOMENTS LATER
We are looking down on the stormclouds as Serenity bursts out of them, comes at us, flared by the sun behind the planet as she passes us, her Firefly effect lighting up, about to shoot off into the heavens --

There is a spark and a piece of paneling pops off, whips at camera, blacking out the frame.

MAL (O.S.)
What was that?

THE END